



## FACT CHECKERS UNITE TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT: THE REDCHEQ ALLIANCE AND INFORMATION INTEGRITY IN COLOMBIA'S REGIONAL ELECTIONS, 2019

*Alexis Bernigaud drafted this case study based on interviews conducted with journalists and civic leaders in Colombia from January through May 2023. Case published July 2023.*

### SYNOPSIS

During Colombia's 2016 peace agreement referendum and its 2018 election, misinformation and disinformation circulated widely. As the country's 2019 elections approached, Dora Montero, president of Consejo de Redacción (Editorial Board)—an association that promoted investigative journalism and operated an online fact-checking program called ColombiaCheck—realized it was especially difficult to correct factual errors at the regional and local levels, and she was determined to do something about that problem. Montero and her group assembled a network of journalists who detected and countered false claims during the 2018 campaign. Montero's team organized workshops on fact checking for local journalists; forged alliances with local and national radio, TV, and print media; and collaborated with universities and civic leaders to produce and distribute articles that presented the facts. During the 2019 campaign, the alliance, named RedCheq, produced 141 articles that clarified and corrected political statements, social media posts, photos, and videos. This case focuses on the challenges associated with improving the integrity of election-related information at the subnational level. This case is part of a series on combatting false information, including both misinformation (unintentional), disinformation (intentional), and fake news, one form of disinformation.

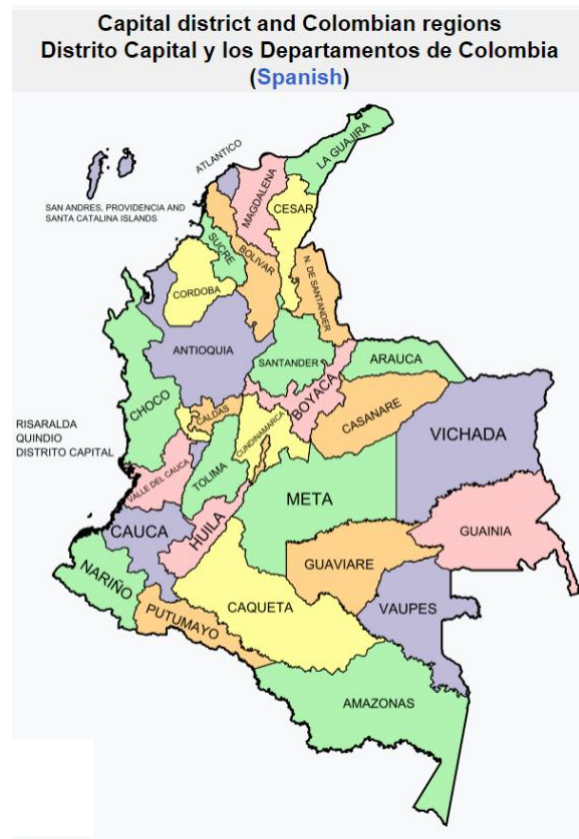
## INTRODUCTION

Colombian journalist Dora Montero regarded fact checking as one of her profession’s most important functions. Sorting truth from fiction took time and skill, and to many, it seemed like a losing battle. But it was a crucial public service—especially when voters had to choose between candidates in elections. Instances of misinformation (inaccurate information shared without harmful intent) and disinformation (*intentionally* false or misleading information) had become more frequent during Colombia’s two prior votes: a 2016 national referendum and the 2018 presidential campaign. In July 2018, Montero became president of Consejo de Redacción (Editorial Board), an association that promoted investigative journalism and operated an online fact-checking program called ColombiaCheck. In early 2019, in conversation with journalists working in Colombia’s 32 departments (political districts), Montero realized that disinformation and misinformation circulating at the local level targeted issues and audiences different from those she was accustomed to seeing in Bogotá, the capital city (figure 1). ColombiaCheck was therefore poorly positioned to offer effective fact checking as the 2019 campaigns for regional and local offices began. In response to the differences, it made sense to engage journalists whose reporting focused on community affairs rather than national politics, but local news reporters lacked the skills and resources to do extensive fact checking.

The question was how Consejo de Redacción could intervene effectively. In 2018, Montero had organized workshops for local journalists on how to cover elections. This time she envisioned going a step further by organizing a countrywide media alliance to combat inaccurate information during the October 2019 regional elections.

The need was urgent. The Colombian political scene was unsettled. A 2016 peace agreement between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces

**Figure 1: Departments of Colombia**



of Colombia (FARC) had aimed to end a 50-year civil war. Not all Colombians had considered the terms acceptable, however, and in an October 2016 referendum, voters rejected the agreement by a narrow margin, with 50.2% voting against the agreement and 49.8% in support of it. Two years later, Iván Duque Márquez, candidate of the country's main conservative party, the Democratic Center, which had opposed the peace agreement, won the presidential election—with 54% of the vote—capturing a plurality in 24 of the country's 32 departments. The next year, center and center-left parties positioned themselves to make comebacks at the local level, however, and left, right, and center had all learned how to use media strategically so as to achieve victory in subnational electoral contests. During the early months of 2019, misinformation and disinformation were rife.

## THE CHALLENGE

“As a journalist, I always thought that local elections were the most important things I could cover, because I think they show the real state of the country—how political elites run things,” Montero said. “Although these elections had consequences for the whole country, I realized that we had not fact-checked enough information at the regional level.”

Consejo de Redacción, which was funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, a United States–based foundation dedicated to strengthening democratic institutions around the world, had launched ColombiaCheck during the run-up to the 2016 referendum on the peace agreement. At the time, political parties used disinformation as a tool to influence preferences and mobilize their voters. In a 2016 interview, Juan Carlos Vélez, who coordinated the Democratic Center Party's campaign to reject the peace agreement, explained that he had discovered the power of social media that year and that the “no” campaign had focused on using targeted social media messages to generate feelings of anger among members of the public. Vélez told one Colombian legal-news outlet that spreading region-specific messages to cause outrage was more effective than spending time and resources explaining the peace agreement and that this recognition made the “no” campaign “one of the cheapest ones in the history of the party.”<sup>1</sup> Both the “yes” and “no” coalitions created WhatsApp groups and sent chains of disinformation that could be shared throughout that platform.<sup>2</sup>

ColombiaCheck, which was inspired by Argentine nonprofit fact-checking organization Chequeado and funded by Open Society Foundations,<sup>3</sup> initially focused on fake news related to the peace process. Based in Bogotá, ColombiaCheck covered mainly national news and was incapable of reviewing the large quantities of electoral information propagated at the regional level.

Creating a system to meet the need for review of electoral information at the regional level was no easy task. The sheer volume of news and information generated during local and regional votes created a massive challenge for any fact-checking effort. The peace referendum, which had triggered the creation of

both ColombiaCheck and Detector de Mentiras (Lie Detector), a fact-checking initiative of news website La Silla Vacía (the Empty Chair)—was only one of several political events flawed by misinformation and disinformation. During the 2018 presidential campaign that had ended with the Democratic Center Party's candidate Ivan Duque's victory over left-wing candidate Gustavo Petro, the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab reported that both candidates and their supporters shared false information.<sup>4</sup> There was no evidence that bots, which are automated programs often designed to mimic human users, had been used for artificially increasing their impact, but the messaging reached many people on such platforms as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp.

The Misión de Observación Electoral (Electoral Observation Mission), a civil society organization that promoted civil rights, analyzed several cases of online disinformation during the 2018 presidential campaign and showed that in many instances, online communities that shared a false news item and those that refuted it had little overlap in membership—and therefore little contact with each other—making it difficult for verified content to reach the propagators of fake news.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, it was difficult to engage the attention of voters, many of whom had no regular access to the internet. In 2018, when 64% of the Colombian population reported using the internet, United States–based think tank Freedom House pointed out significant geographic and socioeconomic disparities.<sup>6</sup> In 2018, internet access ranged from 75% among higher-income Colombians to less than 50% among lower-income Colombians. In some regions, more than 80% of the population lacked internet connectivity, Freedom House reported.<sup>7</sup>

The disparities in internet accessibility made cell-phone-based social media and messaging apps important sources of information for many Colombians. In 2017, 87.3% of citizens used WhatsApp, notably because widely popular prepaid mobile plans included free access to applications such as WhatsApp or Facebook.<sup>8</sup> Fact checkers could use software to monitor social media, but they could not use automated tools to access the content of private messaging apps such as WhatsApp, where chains of disinformation proliferated.

To achieve its goal, Consejo de Redacción had to find ways to reach those local audiences with verified information. Newspapers, radio, and television seemed to offer other viable channels alongside social media. A 2017 survey conducted by the Colombian government's statistics division estimated that 55% of the population older than 12 years of age read newspapers, including 61.3% of people 26 to 41 years of age.<sup>9</sup> Such readers were concentrated in lower- and middle-income urban areas. Television, which was dominated by two private channels, had the broadest reach: TV signals reached about 92% of the country, and 91% of families had at least one television. About 80% of households reported listening to radio, and there were 1,596 radio stations, including 626 community stations.<sup>10</sup>

These more conventional media did not necessarily provide ways of improving the flow of accurate information about local elections, however. Several studies indicated that media consolidation had weakened local newspapers, whose reporters spent much of their time soliciting advertising instead of investigating and writing. Moreover, because some of the media owners themselves held political office, there was no guarantee that people would receive nonpartisan coverage of regional campaigns and regional issues.<sup>11</sup> Further, according to the Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP, or Foundation for Freedom of the Press), in 2018, 8.8 million Colombians—about 18% of the population—lived in so-called silenced areas, where local information was not available, often because no local media existed.<sup>12</sup>

Assuming it was possible to find a reliable conduit for nonpartisan, accurate, election-related information, a second major challenge arose: how to generate capacity to fact-check information about local-level elections.

Structural barriers to the development of local media included not only a limited pool of people with appropriate skills but also journalists' fear of aggression and the risk that politically connected companies might pull their ads and thereby jeopardize a media outlet's financial stability. About 36% of journalists who responded to a 2016 survey said they avoided publishing information due to fear of "attempts on their life or other risks," and FLIP reported that high levels of impunity for people who killed journalists discouraged newspaper staff members from covering public policy issues and political debate.<sup>13</sup> The survey also found that 62% of journalists knew about outlets that had modified their editorial content to obtain advertising revenue or political favors.<sup>14</sup> Carlos Rodríguez-Pérez, professor of communication at Sabana University in Chía, north of Bogotá, said in an interview that financial pressure often led to the capture of local media by private interests.

It would take more than one organization to help local journalists fact-check and engage readers, but Colombia's news organizations had no record of working together on that sort of project, Montero said. National-level media organizations were usually divided along political lines. "Polarization was not as bad in 2019 as it is today," Montero observed in 2023. "But there's always jealousy between journalists, and that was one of our concerns." There were two other options: one was to work with government—for example, with the Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil (National Civil Registry), which managed elections—and the other was to work with civic groups or academic institutions. Because Consejo de Redacción promoted investigative journalism, often on issues of corruption, the team always refused to work with public entities. Collaborating with other elements of civil society and universities was the preferred alternative.

## FRAMING A RESPONSE

In early November 2018, Montero participated in the eighth edition of the Latin American Investigative Journalism Conference in Bogotá. At a workshop

on fact checking, she met with Dulce Ramos of both the International Fact-Checking Network<sup>15</sup> and Facebook. Montero told Ramos about the regional workshops that Consejo de Redacción was organizing to cover the Colombian local elections, and Ramos described the Mexican Verificado 2018 initiative, which brought together 60 media outlets to fact-check materials related to the country's 2018 general election.

After the conversation, Montero felt confident that Consejo de Redacción could adapt the format of Verificado 2018 in Colombia, with emphases on local media and regional training workshops. Mexico “had done a huge amount of work to unite forces against misinformation during presidential elections,” Montero noted. “So I said, ‘Let’s do this for the regional elections.’”

After discussing the idea with Pablo Medina, director of ColombiaCheck, and getting approval from Consejo de Redacción’s steering committee, Montero decided to reach out to several organizations for funding of the project. Following advice from Ramos, who told Montero that Facebook might be interested in supporting the initiative, and because ColombiaCheck had started collaborating with Facebook in 2018 through its Third-Party Fact-Checking program,<sup>16</sup> she submitted to Facebook in March 2019 a first proposal for a national fact-checking network. Knowing that Twitter and Google also funded collaborative journalism projects, she contacted those two companies as well.

The initial strategy consisted of two elements: The first comprised a series of workshops designed to bolster the ability of local media to do effective fact checking by training local journalists on specific fact-checking methods. The sessions drew participants from all regions of the country and aimed to identify individual journalists who would take part in a nationwide network for detecting and countering misinformation. The second element consisted of reaching out to schools of journalism and their students to request that they produce articles that would expose incorrect information for the network. The organizers later named the system RedCheq, a contraction of the Spanish word *red* (network) and *chequeadores* (fact checkers).

While they were awaiting an answer from Facebook, Twitter, and Google, Montero and Medina started contacting partners and quickly found they had to adapt. Although Montero’s original plan was to collaborate with existing academic departments at universities so that students could work with the alliance as part of their curricula, universities required complicated formal agreements to make such an arrangement possible. Montero decided instead to engage individual professors, train them at sessions organized by Consejo de Redacción, and contract with them as subeditors who would manage the production of articles by students, who would receive coaching as part of their coursework or extracurricular experience. Professors who joined the effort came from Javeriana University, La Sabana University, Ibagué University, Santiago de Cali University, Manizales University, and the Autonomous University of Bucaramanga.

Montero also met with the Electoral Observation Mission, which agreed to share information, reports, and examples of electoral misinformation it had detected. “We already had a bilateral relationship with ColombiaCheck,” said Diego Rubiano, a researcher at the MOE in 2019. “Because of our expertise [on electoral issues], they contacted us as a source to help clarify information about the electoral process.”

The budget for 2019 was roughly 683,707,000 pesos (equivalent to US \$212,000).<sup>17</sup>

## GETTING DOWN TO WORK

In June 2019, when Facebook agreed to finance the initiative, Montero scrambled to hire a full-time employee who would coordinate the program and run the planned workshops. Only a month remained before the start of the campaign, which would run from July 27 to October 26, the day before the election.<sup>18</sup> “We didn’t have time to launch a regular recruiting process, so we asked individuals we trusted to recommend potential candidates,” said ColombiaCheck director Medina. One of Consejo de Redacción’s academic partners recommended Nicolás Rodríguez, a journalist in the city of Bogotá’s press office. “He was a good fit for the job, because we needed someone who knew about journalism and logistics,” said Medina.

Facebook was the initiative’s main sponsor. It funded seven local workshops, a launch event, stipends for local journalists, and salaries for a coordinator and a designer. The team also received financial support from Google, and it used previous funding from the National Endowment for Democracy to organize two workshops in 2019. In lieu of lending direct financial support, Twitter offered free advertising for RedCheq on its platform. The ads enabled voters who were concerned about the accuracy of information to connect with fact-checked content on RedCheq.

Although Consejo de Redacción acknowledged the help these companies provided and although the companies themselves showcased their efforts to fight misinformation, Montero highlighted her organization’s efforts to remain independent. “Of course, the companies wanted to be at the launch event and do their communication thing; that was not an issue. The agreements signed with our sponsors contained very strict clauses to protect our editorial independence. The companies did not influence our content, and they never tried to,” she said.

### *Adapting the design*

Montero and her team made two further changes to the program design. Drawing on lessons from its experience in Mexico, Facebook suggested the team consider broadening the scope of the project by persuading major national media outlets to join the alliance. “We blended together our initial idea of a fact-checking network with their idea of a consortium, which meant getting national

### Text Box 1: Members of the RedCheq Alliance

Membership in the RedCheq alliance has varied over time, and it continues to so vary. In October 2019, members of the alliance were:

National media partners

- Newspapers *El Espectador*, *El Tiempo*
- TV channels Caracol, RCN, RedMás TV
- Radio station Caracol Radio
- Independent online news websites KienyKe, La Cola de Rata, Krak

Regional media partners

- Regional newspapers *El Nuevo Oriente* (Casanare and Arauca), *El Colombiano* (Antioquia), *La Opinión* (North Santander), *Vanguardia* (Santander), *El País* (Valle del Cauca), *El Universal* (Bolívar)
- Local independent news websites REC Sur (Florencia), Play Tumaco (Tumaco), Morada Noticias (Medellín), TuBarco (Cali), MiPutumayo (Putumayo)
- Local radio stations Cacica (Valledupar), Marandua Stereo (San José del Guaviare)

media to sign an agreement about fact checking during the elections,” Montero said.

From July to August, Montero organized a series of one-on-one meetings with representatives of national media outlets in an effort to convince them to join the network. She offered them a deal: they could access a repository with all the articles the network produced, in return for their help in producing fact-checking articles and for promoting the initiative through their communication channels. Consejo de Redacción would also offer free training to partner media.

There was initial pushback involving, among other things, credit for the articles network members produced. Montero said she knew media outlets were often ideologically opposed to one another and would be hesitant to host articles a competitor produced. She proposed that when using content produced under the auspices of the alliance, partners simply credit RedCheq instead of using the bylines of the authors and the media organizations that employed them. Consejo de Redacción’s board accepted the recommended approach by consensus, and this step boosted willingness to collaborate. By early August, major national outlets had started to join the RedCheq alliance, including the country’s two main TV channels and two of the most popular newspapers in the country (text box 1).<sup>19</sup> RedCheq paid local journalists and local media partners that agreed to dedicate staff members to the production of articles, but it did not offer compensation to bigger, national media partners. According to Rodríguez, RedCheq each month offered its partners 1 million to 1.5 million pesos (US\$300 to US\$450 in August 2019) to produce a minimum of four articles.<sup>20</sup>

The funders’ other suggestion was to include civil society partners outside the media sector. “Initially, this was a project only for journalists,” said Montero. Drawing on the experience of Mexico’s Verificado 2018 program, Facebook suggested Consejo de Redacción involve activists who could help promote the initiative and share articles.<sup>21</sup>



### Text Box 2: Fact-Checking Methodology

The media alliance used ColombiaCheck’s fact-checking methodology, which consisted of a series of principles and steps.

#### 1. *Selecting content*

The team selected statements publicly pronounced by public figures or content shared on social media or portals. To decide whether or not to check the statements or content, ColombiaCheck took into account the issue’s relevance for public debate and the reach of the content.

ColombiaCheck did not analyze opinions or statements whose veracity could not be determined by means of data or reliable sources.

#### 2. *Comparing content with available data*

Fact checkers compared the statement or content with data from primary sources and information provided by experts. In the case of public figures, fact checkers would reach out to the individual in order to offer the opportunity to indicate the source supporting the statement. To provide a detailed assessment, fact checkers analyzed each component of the statement separately.

#### 3. *Categorizing content*

As a result of the fact-checking process, fact checkers could categorize content as:

- “True” when all the components of the content or statement corresponded to the facts
- “True, but—” when the components of the content matched available data but omitted important contextual information
- “Questionable” when the components of the content matched available data but reached erroneous conclusions or when no consensus existed around correct interpretation of the data
- “False” when the components of a statement were contradicted by facts
- “Uncheckable” when no reliable sources were available to determine the veracity of a statement or when a statement expressed an opinion

#### 4. *Drafting the article*

Once they reached a conclusion, fact checkers drafted an article that explained the steps used in checking the accuracy of a statement—and provided the sources used—so as to enable readers to go through the same steps. The article also included context for the statement or content.

Montero asked Movilizadorio, a community organizing group with which she had worked in the past, to share RedCheq’s articles with its network. Montero and Medina also joined some of Movilizadorio’s WhatsApp group chats in order to open a conversation with other community organizations and civic leaders throughout the country. Montero said she chose Movilizadorio because it was not affiliated with a political party. “At that time, whereas most NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] had clearly decided to support left-wing or centrist candidates, Movilizadorio decided to conduct its activism without

proselytism,” she said. Her team took part in El Avispero [the Hornet’s Nest], a network that Movilizadorio had launched years earlier (text box 2).

*Organizing workshops throughout the country*

When he moved into his new role in August 2019, Rodríguez immediately started to organize regional workshops. At each workshop, members of the Consejo de Redacción staff explained ColombiaCheck’s methodology, discussed how the program selected topics to investigate, and identified the digital tools they used for checking information.

RedCheq later posted a schematic version of its fact-checking process on its website: “1) We select content that circulates on social networks or portals and assess its importance, taking into account the relevance of the topic to the public debate and the scope of the publication. 2) We verify the veracity of the publication, and with data and facts we analyze each of the elements. 3) We compare sources. 4) We put the publication in context. 5) We make clear the verification route and the reasons we assign a certain rating.”<sup>22</sup>

In the workshops, staff from ColombiaCheck also explained how to use reverse image search to check for fake pictures or photos taken out of context, digital tools such as Google Maps and Google Earth Pro, and browser extensions helpful for customizing searches.<sup>23</sup> The training sessions also introduced web-based diagnostic tools such as InVID and FotoForensics, which could be used to analyze videos and pictures, and web search engines such as Yandex, which enabled users to focus on specific geographic areas.

After the workshops, Rodríguez and his team put together a list of journalists who demonstrated both interest and talent and offered them individual contracts to produce articles for the network. By mid-August, RedCheq had recruited 14 journalists from 14 departments.

Although lack of skilled journalists was the main reason for not covering Colombia’s 32 departments, resources and management capabilities, too, limited the project’s scale. “If we had found 32 qualified individuals, we wouldn’t have had the resources to pay them, and it would have been impossible to coordinate the work of 32 journalists,” Rodríguez said. The alliance relied on local media partners to fact-check the campaign in some of the departments where RedCheq either (1) could not identify qualified individuals who were willing to take part or (2) could not afford to contract with people. For the 12 departments in which the alliance had neither employees nor local media partners, the team asked RedCheq journalists working in neighboring departments to extend their monitoring to include a larger area. Altogether, RedCheq managed to establish a presence in five of the country’s six regions (figure 2).

*Organizing a launch event for the alliance*

RedCheq organized a launch event held on August 13–14 at the Bogotá headquarters of Pontifical Bolivarian University. The event was an occasion for the 14 local journalists it had hired to meet and complete their training, and it

**Figure 2:**  
**Map of Colombia, Six Regions, Including Insular Region**



was a way for Consejo de Redacción to draw public attention to the new initiative.

“During the event, we gathered the journalists we had selected in the regions, journalists from Bogotá, and staff members from ColombiaCheck,” said Montero. “It was our very first meeting together.” The participants helped design how the program would work and had a chance to learn additional techniques for effective fact checking.<sup>24</sup>

The event ended with a collective fact-checking challenge called a Chequeatón (Checkathon), which enabled journalists, working in teams, to apply their skills by using real-life news items. “We selected people from different backgrounds to create teams. It was a way for them to learn from one another,” said Montero. Because ColombiaCheck had organized a Checkathon in the past, Montero said, she knew it would be a good way to motivate journalists while making sure they learned from the experience. “Each team chose a theme, and

we said we would publish the best article,” she said. “ColombiaCheck’s staff was there to guide them and answer questions.

“It was also a good way to communicate around the new initiative,” she added. Media partners covered the event and published articles to announce that they were joining the alliance, and all of the articles produced during the Checkathon were published on RedCheq’s new website.

### *Producing content*

With less than three months before the October election, the RedCheq-affiliated journalists began their work.

At the regional level, Medina and Rodríguez organized virtual editorial board meetings every week or every two weeks with all 14 local journalists who were part of the program. The local journalists suggested priorities and specific ideas for fact-checking articles and discussed them with Rodríguez and Medina, the latter acting as RedCheq’s editor. Medina would sometimes assign a member of the group a specific topic if the topic appeared on social media or, occasionally, when readers reached out to RedCheq with requests. To identify topics trending in different regions, the team often used CrowdTangle, a social monitoring tool Facebook provided for organizations taking part in its Third-Party Fact-Checking Program. Through the program, Facebook paid independent fact checkers to review posts and rate their levels of accuracy on its platform in order to reduce misleading content.<sup>25</sup> Because these fact checkers rated the accuracy of articles posted on Facebook, but not articles produced by Facebook, there was not a clear conflict of interest.

“We would also guide local journalists in the research process and tell them, ‘You should look at this database or this register.’ Then they would send us the article they had produced, and we would check whether they had applied the methodology,” said Medina. Rodríguez and Medina were in constant contact with local journalists throughout the process.

The team followed a similar process when working with local media partners that had agreed to help produce fact-checked articles. Rodríguez and Medina would get in touch with the partner newspaper’s editor. When Medina reached an agreement with the partner on the content, both RedCheq and the media partner published the article on their websites. “One of the most difficult issues in the system is that it’s not always true or false; there are different categories in between,” said Rodríguez. For example, on one occasion, Medina and Rodríguez thought a proposed statement should be labeled “questionable,” and they had to debate the issue with the journalist and the editor, who argued that the statement was “true.”

Guiding local journalists proved to be more challenging than expected for Medina and Rodríguez. “Fact checking required subtlety, some flair, and the ability to use digital tools. Not everyone could adapt easily to that approach,” said Rodríguez. The inability of some journalists to conform to requirements was a source of frustration at RedCheq. “The journalist would suggest a topic;

we would try to help the journalist find sources, and then the journalist would leave the article unfinished,” Rodríguez said, lamenting the waste of resources.

Getting major national media partners to create content also proved challenging. “[We realized that these] media outlets were very traditional when it came to the methods or procedures they used in their reporting, so the fact-checking process we were promoting didn’t work for them. Some of them used it, but most of them didn’t produce any content for the alliance,” said Rodríguez. Even when partners had committed to making space in their columns for fact-checking articles, their journalists often lacked the time necessary to produce them. “Telling them ‘On top of everything you normally do, you have to do fact checking’ didn’t work,” said Rodríguez.

After spending a month organizing training sessions and pressing the major national newspapers and broadcasters to produce content, Rodríguez and his team decided to reduce what they asked of these partners. Requesting that they share articles produced by other members of the alliance instead of conducting fact-checking stood a better chance of success, they suspected. “Many big media partners weren’t particularly helpful for producing content, but they did help by sharing content and increasing our reach,” said Rodríguez, who added that RedCheq’s strategy was successful in making local issues visible to a broader audience. Although some of RedCheq’s content focused on narrow subjects that interested only readers from specific locales, such information sometimes had implications for an entire region, and regional information could in turn have a nationwide impact, making it more likely that national media outlets would share the article.

During the campaign, Rodríguez and Medina also worked with partner universities. Professors who taught classes in digital journalism, digital tools, or political journalism recruited students through their classes, research groups, or the university newspaper. Each professor acted as a paid subeditor by coordinating the work of a group of student volunteers in the data-mining and drafting phases. Once the content of an article was approved, RedCheq and the university shared it through their own channels. According to Pablo Navarrete, who co-led a group of student volunteers from Santiago de Cali University, working with RedCheq benefited aspiring journalists. “I think the experience was extremely formative,” said Navarrete. “Students learned how to differentiate checkable facts from opinions, how to get in touch with candidates to verify information, and how to use databases and interpret numbers to corroborate statements by candidates.”

Every Wednesday, students would suggest content to check. Navarrete, a journalist on contract with RedCheq, worked hand in hand with the professor to select topics, assemble groups of students, and monitor their work on a day-to-day basis. At the end of the investigation stage, students turned in their first drafts, which Navarrete, the professor, and RedCheq’s editor then reviewed. In most cases, the articles had to go back and forth several times to meet RedCheq’s standards. Navarrete said: “When the editor said they needed more

information, we would meet with the students and tell them to look for the missing data, and they usually ended up finding all the necessary information.” He added that he and the professor often had to fix style issues and add contextual information, however.

Rodríguez described the experiment as a success. In some instances, students who had participated in academic fact-checking activities later contacted RedCheq to become paid fact checkers. “Some of them are still working with us now [in 2023] because they were interested and capable,” he said.

RedCheq posted its articles on its website and on its Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts. Partners such as the Electoral Observation Mission, Movilizadorio, and the Foundation for Press Freedom helped reach more readers by sharing RedCheq’s content on their social media channels. The Gabo Foundation, a longtime NGO partner that promoted better practices in journalism, also helped by publishing the articles in its newsletter.

#### *Ensuring nonpartisan coverage*

RedCheq was nonpartisan, and to avoid politicizing the initiative, the team worked hard to achieve balanced coverage. “[This concern was present] when we chose topics that we would check,” Rodríguez said. “The director and I would say, ‘Maybe we’ve already checked a lot of fake news related to this candidate or this party; let’s try to find news from the opposing party.’ But obviously, that also depended on the quantity of disinformation a candidate would generate. If a candidate kept spreading massive amounts of false information, we would produce more articles about those statements—no doubt about that.”

Montero said the recruitment process helped the team avoid taking on journalists who might have had biases toward or against certain candidates. “The idea that one of the local journalists could think, ‘I’m going to attack this candidate,’ was not a major concern for us. These people had gone through our classes, and the selection process was meticulous, so the risk that they might put one over on us wasn’t that high,” she said.

The recruitment process did not completely protect the initiative from conflicts of interest, however. Although workshop applicants provided résumés and were rejected if they worked for the government or received income from incumbent mayors or governors, Rodríguez and his team did not ask such applicants to declare other circumstances that could generate conflicts of interest, such as family relationships with elected officials or candidates or jobs as communication officers for local candidates. According to Rodríguez, the team prioritized measures to avoid favoring incumbent candidates or privileging perspectives from the government and considered that communication work for political candidates, which was a common source of employment for journalists at the local level, represented less of a risk.

“During elections in small towns, the majority of people working in communications collaborated with candidates, so if we had decided to stop working with people who had links to candidates, we might have ended up not having any journalists in these regions,” said Rodríguez. In cases in which Medina and Rodríguez were aware of such links, they did not allow the journalists to check news related to the candidate with whom they were working, and they watched out for biased statements made in references to other candidates, sometimes asking other journalists on the ground to corroborate the content of the articles. But because RedCheq did not ask journalists to fill out a declaration of interests, Medina and Rodríguez rarely had information that alerted them to the need for these steps.

In one instance, the team first spotted a suspected conflict of interest during review of a draft. “We asked one of our journalists to fact-check a story about a staff member of a candidate for local office. The staff member had reportedly been spotted at night near the headquarters of the local election office on the day that ballot paper was supposed to be delivered.” The journalist’s fact-checking article seemed to favor one of the candidates. After consulting another journalist from the region, Rodríguez realized that the RedCheq local journalist was working for a candidate and favored that candidate’s views. The team did not publish the article.

Rodríguez acknowledged the limits of RedCheq’s approach regarding conflicts of interest. “That’s one thing one could learn from this experience: it would have been good to ask questions on campaign work and family relationships with politicians from the start,” he said.

Rodríguez had feared that journalists would face political pressure at the local level, but he said his concern never became a significant issue. “It wasn’t much,” he recalled. “It was mostly just comments from candidates who were mentioned in our articles, such as, ‘If you spend your time doing fact checking, why don’t you go check what this other candidate says?’”

In one instance, a journalist at a regional newspaper received a call the day after the publication of a fact-checking article. The unknown caller offered money in exchange for removing the online version of the article, which appeared on ColombiaCheck’s website. RedCheq contacted the Electoral Observation Mission to report the incident. The mission was a neutral third party that could flag cases for relevant authorities such as the police or the Office of the Inspector General.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Covering election day*

On election days, the Electoral Observation Mission always set up a newsroom that spent the entire day monitoring the voting process. One of RedCheq’s journalists worked from the newsroom to check information in real time with the help of Electoral Observation Mission staff. “If suspicious information appeared on social media or in newspapers, the RedCheq journalist on duty could ask me and my colleagues to check,” said Rubiano, an observation

mission researcher during October 2019. For instance, the RedCheq staff member could ask the mission's legal department questions related to the election's legal framework. Such collaboration enabled journalists to respond more quickly. "We often see fact-checking articles published a week or two after the initial news because the process takes time. In this case, we tried to do real-time fact checking so as to refute those statements on the same day," he said.

In nine instances, the Electoral Observation Mission, working with RedCheq, was able to take actions that helped prevent public disorder. For example, in a few small municipalities, rumors spread on social media accusing people from neighboring municipalities of disrupting the voting process by casting their ballots in a place where they did not live. "We tried to clarify the situation by saying, 'It is not possible to bring people from other municipalities to vote here, because the electoral roll is already established and closed, so it's not possible for people to vote in your municipality if they did not register here.' That information helped calm things down," said Rubiano.

Although the Electoral Observation Mission had its own system through which citizens could report incidents related to the election process, most of the misinformation was detected by RedCheq's journalists. "With all the work we had, I don't remember cases where we detected false news ourselves," said Rubiano. "The information was coming to us through RedCheq, and we acted as a source of verified information."

Rubiano considered RedCheq a success. "The initiative was very valuable not only because of the work they've done to check information but also because of the impact they had on other media. We are starting to see organizations joining forces instead of working on this topic individually," he said (text box 3).

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

As its activities unfolded, the RedCheq alliance encountered an unanticipated obstacle: overwork. "Two issues we hadn't identified at first were the need to coordinate so many people and the need to review so much content; we were overloaded with work," said Rodríguez. Managing the regional fact checkers proved to be more time-consuming than expected. "We were starting from scratch," said Montero. "At first, it was tempting to tell local journalists, 'We've done a workshop and a few exercises, so you're good to go,' but that's not how it turned out."

Montero had expected that detecting suspicious information would be the hardest part of the task, but it was the application of RedCheq's fact-checking methodology that turned out to be the biggest challenge for journalists. "In the end, the detection part was easy, because misinformation was everywhere," she said. "The methodology was very strict, and our local journalists struggled to apply it because even if they knew a lot about certain topics, they didn't know how to do fact checking." In the last few weeks before the election, Rodríguez



### Text Box 3: The Alliance in Action

RedCheq’s alliance with local newspaper *Vanguardia* illustrated the kinds of relationships organizers sought to build during election periods. *Vanguardia*, formerly *Vanguardia Liberal*, was a local newspaper founded in 1919 in the north-central city of Bucaramanga. In November 2018, Juan Carlos Chío, who had been with *Vanguardia* since 2010, attended the eighth edition of the Latin American Investigative Journalism Conference in Bogotá with three of his colleagues. After seeing examples of fact-checking initiatives in place in Brazil and Mexico, the team started thinking about launching a section dedicated to fact checking for the 2019 regional elections. “We were a relatively small regional media, and doing fact checking at a regional level was very rare at the time,” said Chío.

Having seen the example of a Mexican newspaper called *Animal Político*, whose fact-checking section El Sabueso (the Bloodhound) displayed a dog mascot, Chío wanted to give the new section a visual identity to attract readers. “We thought it would help break the well-behaved, academic image that fact checking is often connected with,” said Chío. He chose the hormiga culona, a local variety of ant, as a mascot and gave the section a name based on a local idiom: *no sea pingo* (don’t be a fool).

When Consejo de Redacción reached out to *Vanguardia* in the spring of 2019 to talk about its fact-checking alliance, Chío and his team were already in the process of designing the new section. “[Consejo de Redacción] clearly helped us a lot because it was a first for us. Reading, studying, looking at what others were doing is one thing, but with the first exercises we did with them, we realized how easily we could fall into traps—even as journalists,” said Chío. In the training sessions, Chío and his team came to learn how easy it was to manipulate information. They also learned how to be more careful with the data they handled. More important, staff members from ColombiaCheck tutored *Vanguardia*’s journalists throughout the campaign. “When we started, they had already had three or four years of experience, so every time we were uncertain about something, we could ask them what we should do, and they would give us feedback.”

The main challenge for *Vanguardia* was conformance to the methodology. “I think it happens to all fact checkers: you want to publish the article right after the false news has been published, because you know it’s false and you want to counter it.” However, RedCheq was very strict when it came to its methodology. “It would sometimes take us two or three days to get to the level of accuracy they needed from us.” In the end, Chío acknowledged that this burdensome process was essential to ensure that readers could trust the articles. “Making ironclad articles that mentioned all sources [enabled readers] to say, ‘Yes, there is no doubt about that,’” he said.

and Medina had to refine the team’s original process in order to optimize the use of local knowledge within the coalition.

“[In September,] we had to organize a meeting to tell our colleagues at ColombiaCheck, ‘We need help with the regional fact checkers; please take some of your time to mentor them,’” said Rodríguez, who took advantage of the fact that ColombiaCheck’s staff had come from a variety of regions. “We would tell

our colleagues: ‘You’re from Manizales? Help us with the Paisa region’; ‘You’re from Cali? Then help us with the Pacific region’; and so on. We ended up involving all 13 employees from ColombiaCheck.”

Although the team eventually managed to address the problem, staff members nonetheless worked a great deal of overtime. “One big lesson was that the alliance needed a subeditor who could work hand in hand with ColombiaCheck’s editor and its director,” said Rodríguez.

## ASSESSING RESULTS

RedCheq’s overall impact on the 2019 election campaign was an open question. “In reality, our impact is hard to measure,” Rodríguez acknowledged. “We did see instances in which a local candidate would share our content and say, ‘See, I was right!’ or nice examples of candidates who said something like, ‘I published this content that someone had shared with me, but it turns out that they checked it and it was false, so I apologize.’ The fact that it reached them shows that we had an impact.”

According to the reports RedCheq sent to Facebook, from mid-August to November 2019 the alliance produced a total of 141 fact-checking articles. In October, the most-viewed article on its website was seen by 6,250 individuals. In reports, the RedCheq team identified common disinformation methods used in various parts of the country, such as sharing fake poll results to influence voters and using the visual identity of well-known newspapers such as *Revista Semana* or *El Espectador* to convince readers that the articles they read were real. The candidacy of Claudia López Hernández, a gay woman running for mayor of Bogotá, was a particular subject of misinformation and disinformation. (Claudia López Hernández later won the election, however.)

A study published in 2022 and led by Sabana University professor Carlos Rodríguez-Pérez<sup>27</sup> analyzed 134 articles published on RedCheq’s website during the 2019 campaign and found that:

- 56% of the content checked by RedCheq came from Twitter and Facebook, 20% from traditional media outlets, 10% from online newspapers, and 6% from messaging apps such as WhatsApp. Other sources represented 8% of the content.
- 34% of the articles checked public statements made by politicians, 28% checked photos or images, and 27% checked written posts. Texts published by media and web portals, videos, and other content made up the remaining 11%.
- RedCheq’s articles focused mainly on local and municipal issues (72%) and departmental issues (22%). A majority of them focused on electoral news such as information on political alliances and opinion polls or on news related to the economy and infrastructure.
- There was no correlation between the political affiliation of the source and whether RedCheq categorized a piece of content as true or false.

With regard to scope, RedCheq was able to reach most parts of the country. “We covered the political processes in most regions of Colombia,” said Rodríguez. Because of the weakness of local journalism in such departments as Amazonas, Rodríguez and his team could not always identify journalists who were both able and willing to participate in the initiative. RedCheq was present in five of Colombia’s six natural regions—Amazon, Andean, Caribbean, Orinoco, and Pacific—but was unable to cover the Insular region, which included islands in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

The effort also enhanced skills and initiated partnerships that could endure beyond a single election. “We managed to work with 14 journalists throughout the country as well as 30 media and other partners,” Rodríguez said.

Although contracts with local journalists established a target of four articles per month, several fell short of the required number. For Montero, spending time working on an article that didn’t end up being published could seem like a waste of time for an editor, but the process still had value. “There were moments when my colleagues would tell me, ‘This isn’t working, and we’re getting late,’ and I would say, ‘You’re instructors before anything else; that’s the game,’” she said. “Because even if you spend four months editing an article, the local journalist will end up knowing how to do it, so it’s worth it. And even if the local journalist ends up producing only two fact-checking articles for the whole electoral process in that region, we’re winning, because no one else would have done it, and no one else is interested in doing it—apart from people who actually suffer from [disinformation] locally.”

In addition, Rodríguez said RedCheq became a go-to source of advice on disinformation and fact checking: “Since [2019], ColombiaCheck and the alliance have become a model with regard to disinformation. Every time a university, a media outlet, or a public entity needed someone’s insight on disinformation, they would call us.” Members of the public began to send information via text or email seeking help with fact-checking, noted a study by three university researchers, an indication both that people found the posts useful and that the alliance’s posts had started to improve digital literacy.<sup>28</sup>

After the regional elections, the RedCheq alliance dissolved and its members went their separate ways. In 2020, Facebook offered to fund fact-checking work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. “We reopened RedCheq, but it wasn’t the same as the 2019 alliance because we had limited resources. ColombiaCheck hired regional fact checkers to produce articles, which were published on a dedicated page on ColombiaCheck’s website,” Montero recalled.

For the 2022 presidential elections, Consejo de Redacción launched a new version of the RedCheq alliance and tried to learn lessons from the first attempt. To reduce editorial workloads at ColombiaCheck, RedCheq separated from its parent organization and worked with its own staff, including a new editor, but that decision to separate RedCheq from ColombiaCheck slowed progress. “It was a new team, and most of them did not have experience in working on

disinformation, so they had to start from scratch,” said Rodríguez. For him, that lack of experience limited the impact of the initiative in 2022, but there were also other reasons fact checking may have had reduced impact.

Moreover, in 2022, the media landscape was much more polarized than in 2019, and political parties and their allies resumed the strategic use of disinformation. After one major right-leaning national media outlet agreed to take part in the alliance for the presidential election, Montero struggled to convince others to join. “In a context in which journalists were attacking one another, none of the [national outlets] wanted to put their signatures next to theirs. And even though we eventually managed to get around 30 media outlets on board, the vast majority of them were small, independent media,” said Montero. The result was that RedCheq’s inability to attract major national media limited the diffusion of its content.

After the presidential elections, Consejo de Redacción decided that the RedCheq alliance for the 2023 regional elections would be managed internally by ColombiaCheck, reinstating a version of the earlier collaboration between the two organizations.

## REFLECTIONS

RedCheq was an experiment designed to help counter inaccurate local election information, and the question for its organizers was how to enhance its impact. Some of its leaders and external champions focused on ways to expand and strengthen capacity to develop fact-checked information, and others concentrated on ways to project that information at scale.

In 2022 and 2023, as in 2019, RedCheq struggled with a disconnect between the speed at which disinformation spread and the time needed to conduct careful fact checking. “I think we take too much time to check information,” said Diego Rubiano at the Election Observation Mission. “I understand that there is a responsibility to do the research and double-check information, and that takes time. But [after we’ve taken] two weeks to check a piece of information, no one is going to care whether or not it was true.”

“I think lack of resources are a big part of the problem,” said Dora Montero, a journalist who launched RedCheq in 2019, speaking about fact checking. Detecting coordinated behavior and identifying topics that attracted disinformation were difficult using only the tools that most journalists had. “We’re always one step behind,” she said. Campaign managers had been the first to use WhatsApp and TikTok to influence elections, and she said she felt journalists were almost always late in monitoring the use of new technologies and their civic impact or in learning to use new tools that would help them identify false information. Conducting high quality fact-checking in all regions or departments also required more editors.

Reaching citizens at scale was a concern for Nicolás Rodríguez, who coordinated RedCheq in 2019. RedCheq relied on its partners to share articles and increase its reach, and Rodríguez acknowledged that his team could have

done more to project fact checks to the citizens most exposed to misinformation. “We didn’t put that much thought into the actual impact. We didn’t really try to identify segments of the audience and define strategies to reach them,” he said.

During the 2022 election, RedCheq started putting measures in place to achieve greater impact. The measures included both changes in article formats and identification of new networks in order to reach more people. “The average shop owner in Chocó is not going to read a five-page article with a bunch of data and numbers, so we started producing videos that tried to give simple explanations using a shorter, more dynamic format,” Rodríguez said. For Rubiano, at the Electoral Observation Mission, it was important to use the channels through which fake news was spread, including WhatsApp or alternative websites. “Some people are not going to read traditional media,” he said.

Scale was also a concern for Cristina Vélez, a former La Silla Vacía journalist who used quantitative analysis to understand online discourse in Colombia during the election period. In 2018, she cofounded nonprofit organization Linterna Verde (Green Lantern) to help civil society understand the dynamics of public speech on social media as well as the impact of this public speech for politics and society. She suggested that although the focus in 2019 was on the content itself—on the assumption that more articles setting the record straight would dispel misinformation and disinformation—the real issue lay in the distribution of that content. She believed that to be able to respond to a wave of disinformation, it was necessary to generate a counterwave of citizens who could use their social media accounts to question false statements. She suggested that such an approach would be more efficient than publishing an article to debunk statements. “I think Colombia lacks the resources to reach more people with fact-checking content,” she said.

Civic groups also needed more awareness of how social media could amplify misinformation, Vélez added. “Civil society’s access to tools that could help them understand the flow of information in the digital sphere was very limited,” she said. “For social movements and activists, there wasn’t much awareness around the importance of analyzing how algorithms shaped opinion trends and misinformation.”

Vélez offered a way to fix the problems of timeliness and reach. She suggested that institutions and civil society should use prebunking, not just debunking. For example, Linterna Verde’s analysis suggested that misinformation that targeted the software used in counting votes could affect the integrity of the electoral process and that foreign governments such as Venezuela or Russia might exploit that vulnerability. “[These narratives about the software] will be copied and pasted in 2023 during the local elections,” Vélez said. For her, the question was how to launch campaigns that would provide information and clarify these issues *before* that happened instead of *after*.

Although these approaches centered on combating the supply of misinformation and disinformation, a number of countries focused their strategies on addressing election-related disinformation and misinformation as ways of improving citizens' ability to recognize distortions and do their own fact checking—that is, on the demand side of the equation. For Daniela Duque, a former e-government professional who managed media education projects for community organizing group Movilizadorio, media literacy was a critical aspect of the fight against misinformation in Colombia. “For us, the concept of digital natives has done a lot of damage because the fact that young people were born in a technological era does not mean they know how to interact with it,” said Duque. “There are no media education classes in Colombian schools.” For Duque, awareness and critical thinking were essential components of a whole-of-society approach against misinformation.

*Vanguardia* journalist and RedCheq participant Juan Carlos Chío emphasized the dual dimensions of an effective campaign against disinformation. Organizations like RedCheq and fact-focused media were crucial—especially because technologies were making it ever easier to present fake news persuasively. But citizens also had to learn to take responsibility for critical thinking, carefully evaluating what they heard and saw in conventional and social media or from candidates themselves, taking to heart the local idiom, *no sea pingo* (don't be a fool).

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- <sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/misinformation-shaping-colombian-election/>.
- <sup>3</sup> Open Society Foundations, founded by George Soros, is a grant-making network that funds independent groups in such areas as justice, democratic governance, and human rights. See <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/who-we-are>.
- <sup>4</sup> See examples at <https://medium.com/dfrlab/electionwatch-misinformation-was-everyday-business-in-colombian-election-7b46ab536d9d>; <https://medium.com/dfrlab/electionwatch-bees-cause-buzz-in-colombia-a7ad06e0be7a>; <https://medium.com/dfrlab/electionwatch-fraud-claims-in-colombia-51e141f57745>.
- <sup>5</sup> See the Electoral Observation Mission's analysis at <https://www.moe.org.co/mas-de-44-millones-de-conversaciones-sobre-proceso-electoral-se-generaron-en-redes/> and <https://www.moe.org.co/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Informe-Final-Redes.pdf>.
- <sup>6</sup> The data source defines internet users as: "individuals who have used the Internet (from any location) in the last 3 months. The Internet can be used via a computer, mobile phone, personal digital assistant, games machine, digital TV etc." See the data at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=CO>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/colombia/freedom-net/2019>.
- <sup>8</sup> See more information in the report at <https://linternaverde.co/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/informe-whatsapp-FINAL-ENG-1OCT.pdf>.
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- <sup>11</sup> On concentration in the media, see Media Ownership Monitor Colombia at <https://colombia.mom-gmr.org/en/findings/audience-concentration/>. On the consequences, see CDAC Network/German Cooperation, Colombia Media Landscape Guide 2022 accessed at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60996b757eb6521a42f3839d/t/6235262b9fb5dc19ef4e9b3/1647650348855/Colombia+Media+Landscape+Guide+En-CDAC.pdf> and Mireya Márquez-Ramírez and Manuel Alejandro Guerrero, «Clientelism and media capture in Latin America,» National Endowment for Democracy, accessed at <https://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Capture5+Clientelism-and-Media-Capture-in-Latin-America.pdf>.
- <sup>12</sup> <https://latamjournalismreview.org/es/articles/casi-9-millones-de-colombianos-viven-en-zonas-de-silencio-segun-un-nuevo-informe-de-la-flip/>.
- <sup>13</sup> The survey was implemented by the Proyecto Antonio Nariño, an alliance led by the Gabo Foundation, a Colombian NGO created by Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez to promote better journalism. The number on "fear of life threat or other risks" comes from respondents' answers to the question, "¿En el último año usted ha evitado publicar determinados temas por miedo a la integridad de su vida u otro tipo de riesgo?" The expression "miedo a la integridad de su vida" was interpreted as threats to their physical integrity and for clarity, translated as "fear of attempts to their life." See <https://www.flip.org.co/index.php/es/publicaciones/informes/item/1855-tercera-encuesta-nacional-periodistas-sobre-libertad-de-expresion-y-acceso-la-informacion>; <https://flip.org.co/index.php/en/publicaciones/informes-anuales/item/2463-informe-anual-2019-callar-y-fingir-la-censura-de-siempre> and <https://semanarural.com/web/articulo/la-lucha-por-informar-desde-las-zonas-silenciadas-de-colombia/263>.
- <sup>14</sup> See <https://www.flip.org.co/index.php/es/publicaciones/informes/item/1855-tercera-encuesta-nacional-periodistas-sobre-libertad-de-expresion-y-acceso-la-informacion> and more information at <https://flip.org.co/cartografias-informacion/home-infografias> and <https://flip.org.co/cartografias-informacion/content/el-pa%C3%ADs-del-silencio>.
- <sup>15</sup> The International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) is an initiative created by United States-based Poynter Institute. The stated goal is the promotion of fact checking in journalism. The IFCN created its own code of principles to help establish standards for fact-checking

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methods. The IFCN also organizes fellowships, training, and conferences. See <https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/>.

<sup>16</sup> Through this program, Facebook relied on independent fact checkers to review and rate the accuracy of posts on its platform. Each time a fact checker categorized a piece of content as false, Facebook limited distribution of the piece, labeled it accordingly, and notified people who tried to share it. More information on the program is at <https://www.facebook.com/formedia/mjp/programs/third-party-fact-checking>.

<sup>17</sup> See <https://colombiacheck.com/sobre-nosotros>

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.moe.org.co/conozca-las-fechas-clave-de-este-proceso-electoral-2019/>.

<sup>19</sup> RCN and Caracol were the country's two main TV channels. *El Espectador* and *El Colombiano* were two of the most popular newspapers in the country. See text box 1 for a full list of media outlets that joined RedCheq. See also <https://www.larepublica.co/internet-economy/medios-tradicionales-lideran-tambien-en-audiencias-digitales-2930895>.

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<sup>21</sup> See <https://revistadecomunicacion.com/article/view/1034>.

<sup>22</sup> See <https://colombiacheck.com/metodologia> and <https://redcheq.com.co/metodologia/>.

<sup>23</sup> Some of the Google tools are available at <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/resources/trainings/google-fact-check-tools/>.

<sup>24</sup> See <https://www.enter.co/empresas/colombia-digital/redcheq-verificadores-elecciones/> and <https://ijnnet.org/en/story/fact-checking-around-world-inside-colombiacheck>.

<sup>25</sup> Through this program, Facebook relied on independent fact checkers to review content on its platform and rate its level of accuracy. Each time a fact checker rated a piece of content as false, Facebook reduced that content's distribution, labeled it accordingly, and notified people who tried to share it. ColombiaCheck started working as a third-party fact checker in 2018. More information on the program is at <https://www.facebook.com/formedia/mjp/programs/third-party-fact-checking>.

<sup>26</sup> The Office of Inspector General (Procuraduría General de la Nación), is a Colombian independent public institution in charge of overseeing the conduct of public officials. See more information at [https://web.archive.org/web/20081121153431/http://www.procuraduria.gov.co/html/infoinstitucional/infoinst\\_quehacemos.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20081121153431/http://www.procuraduria.gov.co/html/infoinstitucional/infoinst_quehacemos.htm).

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<sup>28</sup> Carlos Rodríguez-Pérez, Francisco J. Paniagua-Rojano, and Raúl Magallón-Rosa, Debunking Political Disinformation through Journalists' Perceptions: An Analysis of Colombia's Fact-Checking News Practices, *Media and Communication*, 2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 264–275.





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