



GDI

Global
Disinformation
Index

Media Market Risk Ratings: Mexico

www.disinformationindex.org

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The Global Disinformation Index is a UK-based not-for-profit that operates on the three principles of neutrality, independence and transparency. Our vision is a world in which we can trust what we see in the media. Our mission is to restore trust in the media by providing real-time automated risk ratings of the world's media sites through a Global Disinformation Index (GDI). The GDI is non-political. Our Advisory Panel consists of international experts in disinformation, indices and technology. For more information, visit www.disinformationindex.org

Data Cívica is an NGO based in Mexico City that uses data and programming to advance a human rights, democratic, and gender equality agenda. Data Cívica also works to close the gap in the use of data and technology that exists in México. For more information visit <https://datacivica.org>



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Preface

Since the invention of the web, how we live our lives online—and off—has changed in countless ways. This includes how news is funded, produced, consumed and shared.

With these shifts in the news industry have come risks. Disinformation is one of them. Disinformation has been used as a tool to weaponise mass influence and disseminate propaganda. During the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation has created an infodemic undermining public health, safety and government responses. No country or media market is immune from these threats.

To combat disinformation, we need to find ways to disrupt the system and its funding. This is where the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) has set its focus.

At the GDI, we believe that an independent, trusted and neutral risk rating of news sites' disinformation risks is needed. These risk ratings can be used by advertisers and ad tech companies to ensure that where they direct their online ad spends is aligned with their own brand safety and risk mitigation strategies for disinformation.

The GDI's research offers a trusted and neutral assessment about a news domain's risk of disinforming. By looking at content, operational and context indicators, GDI provides a domain-level rating about a news site's risk of disinforming an online user.

The following report presents the results of applying the GDI risk rating methodology to some of the most frequently visited media sites in Mexico. In total we assessed 31 sites. The country was chosen because of its sizable advertising market, and because its media ownership concentration and close commercial relationship with the government seem to create challenges in the form of misinformation and disinformation. The assessment and report were done in partnership with Data Cívica in Mexico.

Table 1. Media sites assessed in Mexico (in alphabetical order)

| News outlet | Domain |
|---------------------|---|
| Animal Político | https://www.animalpolitico.com |
| Aristegui Noticias | https://aristeguinoticias.com |
| Blog del Narco | https://elblogdelnarco.com |
| El Economista | https://www.eleconomista.com.mx |
| El Financiero | https://elfinanciero.com.mx |
| El Gráfico | https://www.elgrafico.mx |
| El Imparcial | https://www.elimparcial.com |
| El Norte | https://www.elnorte.com |
| El Siglo de Torreón | https://www.elsiglodetorreon.com.mx |
| El Soberano | https://elsoberano.mx |
| El Sol de México | https://www.elsoldemexico.com.mx |
| El Universal | https://www.eluniversal.com.mx |
| Excelsior | https://www.excelsior.com.mx |
| Expansión | https://expansion.mx |
| Heraldo De México | https://heraldodemexico.com.mx |
| Jornada | https://www.jornada.com.mx |
| Latin US | https://latinus.us |
| López Dóriga | https://lopezdoriga.com |
| Milenio | https://www.milenio.com |
| Proceso | https://www.proceso.com.mx |
| Publimetro | https://www.publimetro.com.mx |
| Radio Fórmula | https://www.radioformula.com.mx |
| Razón | https://www.razon.com.mx |
| Reforma | https://www.reforma.com |
| Regeneración | https://regeneracion.mx |
| Revista Zeta | https://zetatijuana.com |
| SDP Noticias | https://www.sdpnoticias.com |
| Sin Embargo | https://www.sinembargo.mx |
| Televisa | https://noticieros.televisa.com |
| TV Azteca | https://www.tvazteca.com |
| Uno TV | https://www.unotv.com |

Introduction

The harms of disinformation¹ are proliferating around the globe—threatening our elections, our health, and our shared sense of accepted facts.

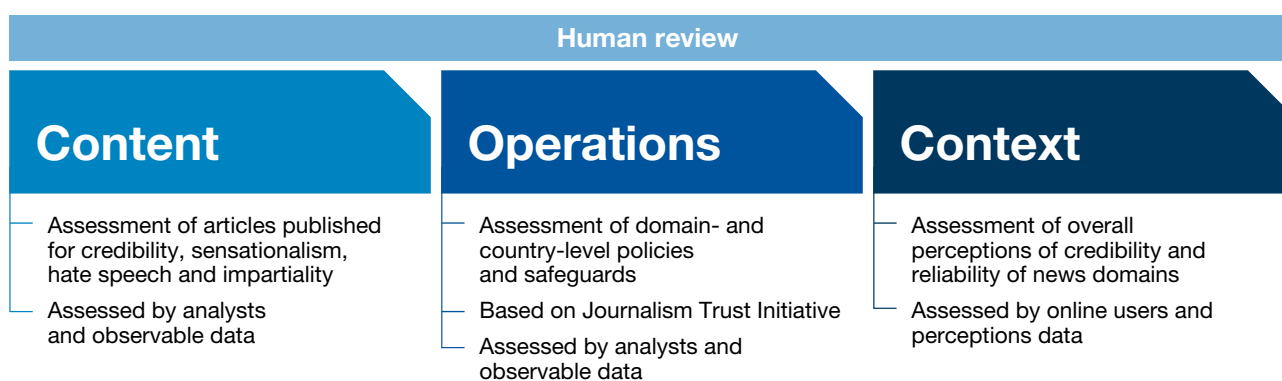
The infodemic laid bare by COVID-19 conspiracy theories clearly shows that disinformation costs peoples' lives. Websites masquerading as news outlets are driving and profiting financially from the situation.

The goal of the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) is to cut off the revenue streams that incentivise and sustain the spread of disinformation. Using both artificial and human intelligence, the GDI has created an assessment framework to rate the disinformation risk of news domains.²

The GDI risk rating provides advertisers, ad tech companies and platforms with greater information about a range of disinformation flags related to a site's **content** (i.e. reliability of content), **operations** (i.e. operational and editorial integrity) and **context** (i.e. perceptions of brand trust; see Figure 1). The findings in this report are based on the three pillars that were manually reviewed: **Content**, **Operations**, and **Context**.³

A site's disinformation risk level is based on that site's aggregated score across all of the reviewed pillars and indicators. A site's overall score ranges from zero (maximum risk level) to 100 (minimum risk level). Each indicator that is included in the framework is scored from zero to 100. The output of the index is therefore the site's overall disinformation risk level, rather than the truthfulness or journalistic quality of the site.

Figure 1. Overview of the GDI disinformation risk assessment



The following report presents findings pertaining to disinformation risks for the media market in Mexico, based on a study of 31 news domains.⁴ The data provide an initial snapshot of the overall strengths and challenges that these sites face to mitigate disinformation risks.⁵

All of these findings come from the research led by the GDI with Data Cívica, in January through May 2021. The market analysis is based on nearly 20 disinformation flags that were assessed for Mexico by Data Cívica and by an independent perceptions survey.⁶

This report presents the average scores for the market sample. Customarily, sites that are rated as a minimum-risk site and/or score above a 90 on any of the three pillars are named and profiled in the report.⁷ In the present study, none of the sampled sites achieved a rating of minimum disinformation risk. However, six sites in the sample scored a rating higher than 90 on the Content pillar. The authors decided to avoid disclosing the name of the best-performing websites in this report because of the current political environment in Mexico. By drawing attention to a small group of publications, the report might heighten the hostility towards the media and endanger journalists, especially those who are critical of the current administration.

The GDI risk rating methodology is not an attempt to identify truth and falsehoods. It does not label any site as a disinformation site—or, inversely, as a trusted news site. Rather, our approach is based on the idea that a range of signals, taken together, can indicate a site's risk of carrying disinformation.

The scores should be seen as offering initial insights into the Mexican media market and its overall levels of disinformation risk. The results are open to debate and refinement with stakeholders from news sites, advertisers and the ad tech industry. (The appendix of this report outlines the assessment framework).⁸ We look forward to this engagement.

Key findings: Mexico

In reviewing the media landscape for Mexico, the assessment found that:

Almost all of the reviewed sites present medium to high levels of disinformation risk.

- Twenty-five sites scored a medium disinformation risk rating, and five sites have a high-risk rating. These include some of the oldest newspapers in Mexico.
- One-third of these sites disclose little or no information about their ownership and funding structure, which is decisive to prevent potential corruption or conflict of interest claims.
- More than two-thirds of the websites lack policies to ensure accuracy. Policies to regulate the comments section and to ensure attribution of stories, facts, and media are missing for half of the sites in the sample.

Only one site presents a low level of disinformation risk.

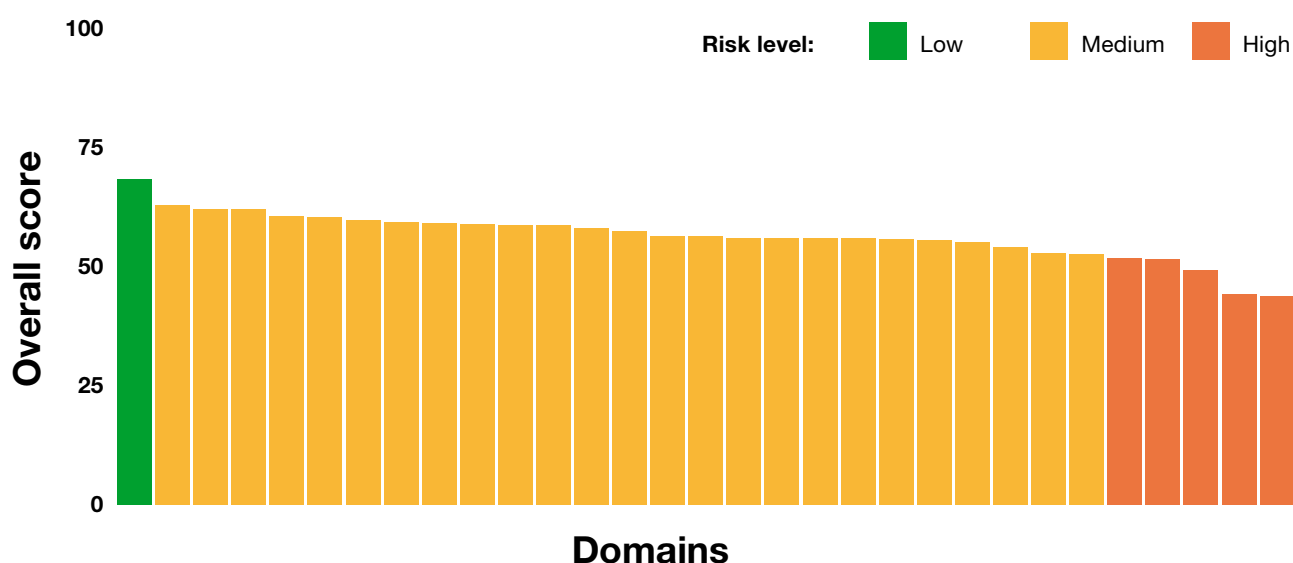
- Only one site in the sample was rated as having a **low disinformation risk**.

- This site performed particularly well on operational indicators, which evaluate a site's editorial checks and balances, such as disclosing information about funding and ownership, attribution policies, guidelines for user-generated content, and editorial principles and practices.
- This site received the highest score in terms of funding transparency, as it thoroughly discloses the structure of its revenue sources. None of the other reviewed sites managed to achieve the same level of detail. This website establishes strong attribution policies, along with extensive editorial principles and practices.

Most sites in the market sample in Mexico performed well on the content indicators, publishing reliable and generally unbiased content.

- Although many of the sites lack some of the operational checks and balances that are considered critical for running an independent and accountable newsroom, most reviewed sites did in fact publish generally unbiased content that does not frequently rely on sensationalist language or negative targeting.
- Most sites also publish content with generally accurate headlines and adequate byline information, such as the main author's name or newswire service that provided the article.

Figure 2. Disinformation risk ratings by site



The Mexican media market:

Key features and scope

The media market in Mexico features a wide range of national and regional newspapers, broadcast television and digital news outlets.

During the last decade, news consumption has gradually expanded in Mexico as a result of the pervasive diffusion of digital platforms, social media, and smartphones. The oldest newspapers consolidated their digital presence by creating official websites and online subscription models, while keeping their print versions available. At the same time, several digital-native news outlets came into existence and managed to position themselves as reliable news sources and to attract a broad audience.

In the current news media market, the newspaper *El Universal*, founded in 1916, leads the online news market, and is also the second most popular outlet among traditional media. At the same time, Aristegui Noticias, UnoTV, and Animal Político are among the most popular digital news media and have succeeded thanks to very different strategies.⁹ Aristegui Noticias, for example, is characterised by strong investigative reporting and a business model focused on content marketing and working with brands to distribute content. UnoTV has a wide market reach thanks to extensive digital distribution facilitated by its parent telecom company, America Móvil, which formerly held the telecommunication monopoly in the country. Lastly, Animal Político stands out because of its journalism model and revenues based on crowdfunding.

Television is the most popular medium in Mexico with both audiences and advertisers.¹⁰ However, the often perverse relationship between the government and the media and a deeply polarised political environment has had a negative impact on trust in the news. Despite the fact that television is still a popular medium, newspaper brands score better in terms of trust, along with some digital-born brands. Additionally, Mexican TV broadcasters often have lower trust scores than foreign broadcasters (e.g. CNN) and some digital-native brands (e.g. Animal Político and Aristegui News).¹¹ Recent survey data also point out that Mexico is one of the few countries where both younger and older age groups show a high interest in local news. This profile is quite different from other media markets, where most local news consumers belong to older age groups.¹²

At the same time, Mexico is one of the biggest ad markets in Latin America. Spending on advertising is estimated to rise to US\$4.63 billion by 2024, placing the country among the world's largest ad markets.¹³ In terms of internet ad spending, this figure is estimated to grow nearly eight percent annually by 2024.¹⁴

The growth in the Mexican online advertising market has followed the increase in internet connectivity in the country.¹⁵ The level of internet penetration in Mexico has risen from less than 10 percent in 2000¹⁶ to reach 67 percent in 2019, with 88 million internet users in the country.¹⁷ This number is expected to rise further to 95 million users by 2025.¹⁸ The rapidly increasing internet access in the country has prompted the creation of digital media outlets to serve growing numbers of online users. Many new media sites have opted to focus their reporting on issues that previously received less coverage, such as systemic violence, corruption and distrust in political and administrative institutions.

However, both traditional and new media outlets still face the potential conflicts of interests and collusion that have historically pervaded Mexican media.¹⁹ The Mexican news media market is characterised by strong financial links with the Mexican government, which historically has provided significant advertising revenues to numerous newspapers and broadcasters. The level of advertisement spending has occasionally been so significant that news media outlets have wound up relying heavily on government advertising. This situation was well documented under the previous government of President Enrique Peña Nieto.²⁰

The use of government advertising as a political tool caused a dramatic change in the Mexican media market's behaviour and its reaction to the candidacy of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), who was elected president in 2018. Major newspapers in Mexico feared his victory because one of his campaign promises was to significantly decrease government-funded advertising. These outlets reacted to AMLO's election by making significant cuts to their workforce and suspending projects. As promised, the new government did reduce its advertising spending. In the first two years of the new government, spending was approximately half of what the previous government had funded, reducing government advertising to \$623 million Mexican pesos (US\$31 million).²¹ Despite this dramatic reduction, AMLO's government has continued to fund a dozen media outlets out of more than a thousand officially registered media providers, including traditional TV outlets such as TV Azteca and Televisa, as well as other outlets like La Jornada and Radio Fórmula.²²

At the local level, most local media outlets depend upon government advertising and struggle to find other sources of revenue to sustain their operations.²³ This reality has a direct impact on the credibility and quality of the content published by news media outlets.²⁴ For instance, some media outlets led smear campaigns through traditional and social media²⁵ in a recently contested city election as result of close relationships between the incumbent mayor and local media outlets.

The quality of Mexican journalism is also hampered by the danger that the journalistic profession entails, as Mexico is considered to be one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists.²⁶ According to one recent report (2020), 692 attacks were carried out against members of the press or media outlets in Mexico, one attack every 13 hours.²⁷ During the same year, six journalists and media workers were murdered.²⁸ In some regions of Mexico, media outlets now avoid covering certain topics, such as the war on drugs, organised crime, and narcotraffic, because of the danger these represent to their staff.²⁹

Disinformation risk ratings

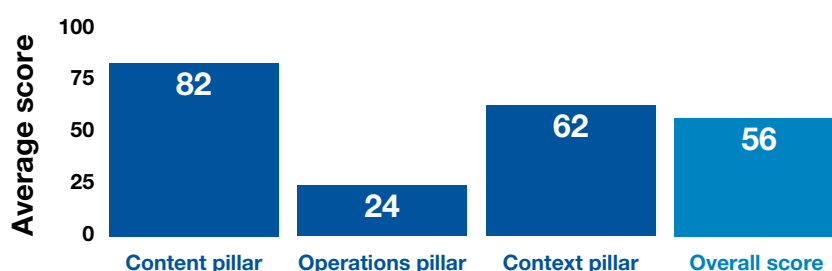
In Mexico, the perverse relationship between the government and the media has hindered the consolidation of Mexican democracy³⁰ and the trust that citizens place in journalists.³¹

Market overview

In order to build trust in Mexican journalism, it is fundamental to increase the transparency of the news media and to decrease disinformation risks. This methodological framework aims to contribute to that goal by providing news outlets and decision makers with practical tools to improve transparency and tackle disinformation.

The findings for Mexican media sites show an uneven distribution in the disinformation risk scores across pillars. The average score for the Content pillar is fairly high (82), reflecting a moderate disinformation risk, as most media outlets publish unbiased content. The majority of the media outlets scored poorly on the Operations pillar (24). A possible explanation is that Mexican media outlets are not used to publishing information regarding their policies, team, financial sources and ownership, which might constitute an important source of disinformation risk. The difference between these two pillars—and the fact that most media outlets performed moderately well in terms of informed readers' brand trust—led to an average score of 56 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Overall market scores, by pillar

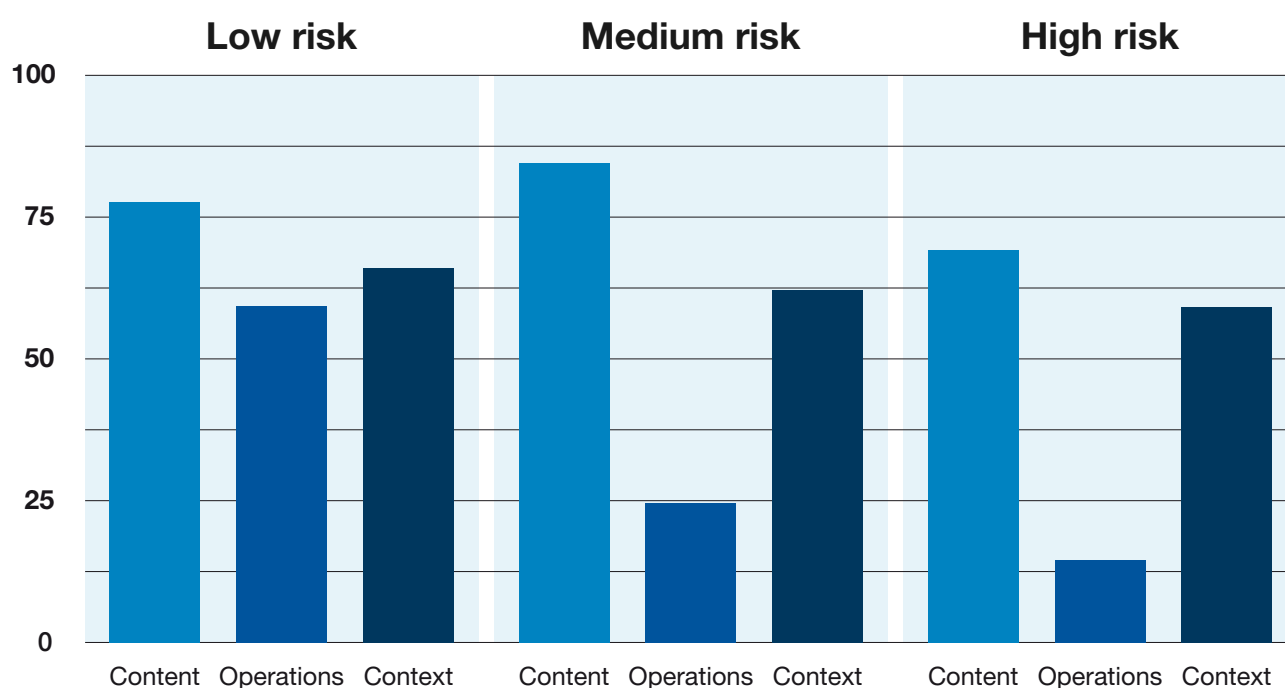


Although no website in the sample was rated with a maximum disinformation risk, no media outlets reached a minimum disinformation risk score either. Most of the sites in Mexico—four out of five sites—received a medium-risk rating. These sites tend to perform well on the Content pillar's indicators, as most of the assessed content was rated as neutral and non-sensationalised. We find hardly any negative targeting towards groups or individuals. This group of sites is also perceived to be fairly well trusted by online users (as measured by the Context pillar). Nonetheless, most news sites in Mexico lack

operational transparency and editorial safeguards and score pretty poorly on operational checks and balances (as measured by the Operations pillar).

Only one site in Mexico received a low-risk rating. This site stands out because it performs significantly better on its operational and editorial transparency and accountability than all of the other evaluated sites. Most evaluated sites did poorly publishing their ownership information or editorial guidelines. The average score of the Operations pillar was 24, and only two sites obtained more than 40 points. Only one site has several of the key operational policies in place, including information about its funding and ownership, guidelines for using statistics, publishing visuals, and user-generated content, and a statement of editorial independence. This site is what we would call an 'outlier', as it differs from the rest of the sites to a great extent.

Figure 4. Average pillar scores by risk rating level



Five sites were assessed with a **high-risk rating**. Like most sites, these domains score poorly on the Operations pillar, with barely any public information about their funding or ownership. Two out of these five sites scored significantly lower than average on this pillar. These sites did fairly well on the Context pillar, with readers perceiving them to publish fairly accurate information and avoid clickbait. Nonetheless, the big differentiator was the reliability of the content that they publish. Four out of the five media sites that were classified as high-risk were also among the worst performers on content-related indicators. The stories assessed from these news sites often failed to provide enough byline information or to start their stories with a fact-based lead. These sites also tended to use sensationalised language and write biased articles (for the sample of articles assessed).

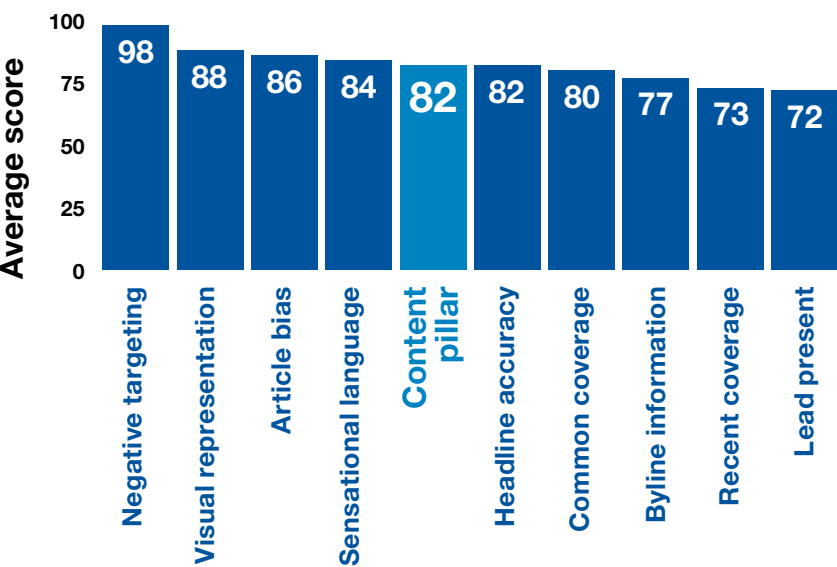
Pillar overview

Content pillar

This pillar focuses on the reliability of the content provided on the site. Our analysis for the Content pillar is based on an assessment of ten anonymised articles for each domain. These articles are drawn from the most frequently shared pieces of content during the data collection period and from a group of topic-based articles.³² All article scores are based on a scale of zero (worst) to 100 (best), as assessed by the country reviewers.

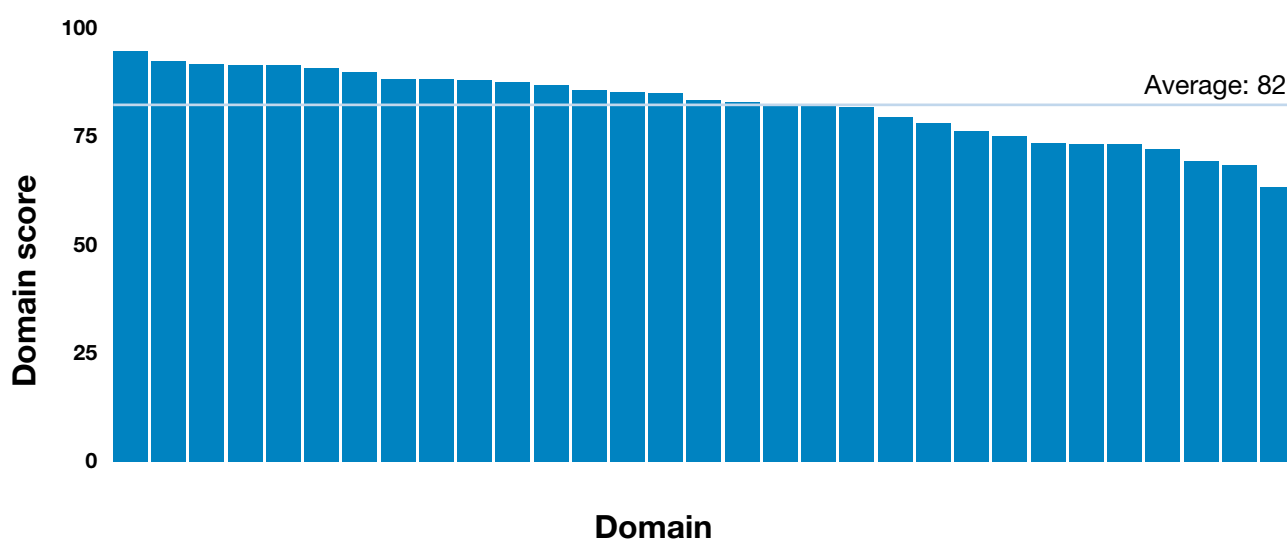
As previously mentioned, most media sites in Mexico performed well on this pillar. We found that most media sites in Mexico tend to publish unbiased and neutral content. Within the sample of articles assessed, there was hardly any negative targeting of groups or individuals. Most sites in Mexico received a perfect score on this indicator. Overall, the findings show that there is a relatively small difference (16 points) between the highest-scoring indicator (negative targeting) and the worst one (use of a fact-based lead). The two indicators, whether sites start their stories with a fact-based lead, and whether they cover recent events, were the two disinformation risk flags that scored relatively low (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Average Content pillar scores by indicator



Six sites obtained more than 90 out of the 100 possible points (see Figure 6). These sites stand out for their unbiased coverage and accurate headlines. All of them obtained more than 90 points on the indicators for article bias and headline accuracy. Although not all of them did a good job at providing enough information in bylines, their pillar score is bolstered by their use of neutral language and the absence of negatively targeting groups in their articles.

Figure 6. Content pillar scores by site

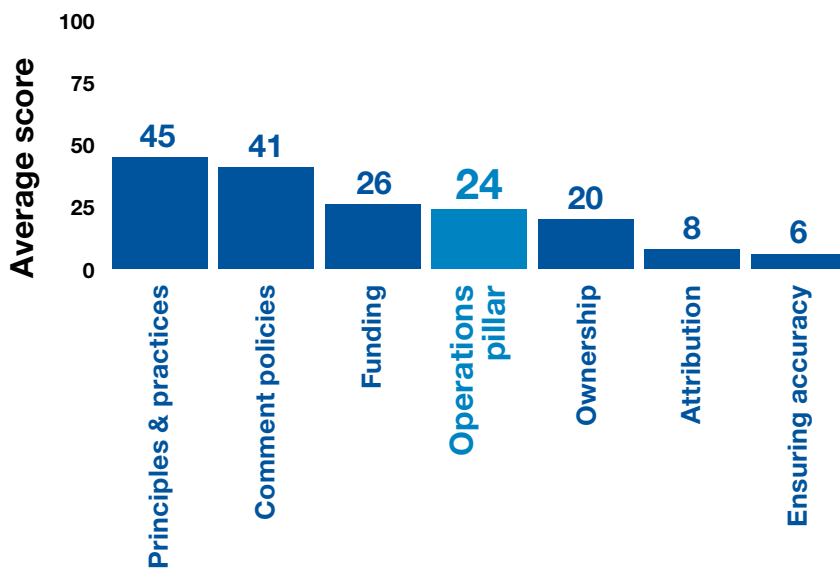
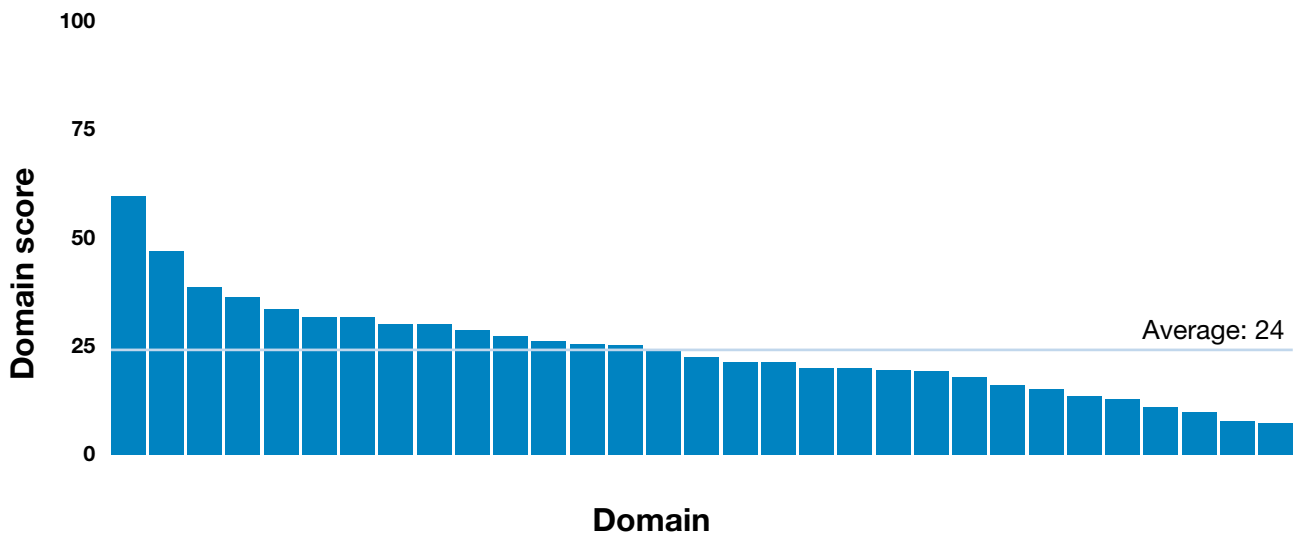


Operations pillar

This pillar assesses the operational and editorial integrity of a news site. All scores are based on a scale of zero (worst) to 100 (best), as scored by the country reviewers according to the information available on the site. The operations indicators are the quickest wins to reduce disinformation risk ratings, as they represent policies that domains can immediately establish and make public.³³

Most sites in our sample did not score well on this pillar. The average score was 24, less than a third of the Content pillar average (see Figure 7). Only 12 out of 31 sites, more than one-third of the sample, publish policies regarding the attribution of stories, facts, and media. These indicators are seen as key factors to ensure accurate facts and authentic and accountable stories. Public information about a site's funding sources was published by only one out of the 31 sites. Only seven websites, or one-fifth of the sample, have policies in place to ensure the accuracy of information on their website, and one-third of the sites had no public information regarding their ownership structure. Surprisingly, few news sites disclose their staff or their editor-in-chief. This lack of information is a notable area of opportunity for the websites in the Mexican media landscape to mitigate their disinformation risk. However, it is important to point out that this is also a reflection of the security threats faced by some news outlets. In some contexts, this lack of transparency may be necessary as a security measure to mitigate the escalating violence against journalists and news outlets in Mexico.

All 31 sites in our sample have the potential to score perfectly on all the indicators of the Operations pillar if they adopt and disclose such operational policies and information, by following the one Mexican news site that has already taken the lead (see Figure 8). The indicators for the Operations pillar are taken from the standards which have been set by journalists as part of the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI).³⁴ As the JTI points out,³⁵ adopting these standards raises credibility in the eyes of the public, compels traditional media to reassess their practices in the digital age, and encourages new media outlets to be more transparent about their business models.

Figure 7. Average Operations pillar scores by indicator**Figure 8.** Operations pillar scores by site

Context pillar

A site's performance on this pillar is a good measure of perceptions of brand trust in a given media site. All scores are based on a scale of zero (worst) to 100 (best), as rated by online users. Context pillar scores show significant room for improvement for many domains, although online users' perceptions can be shifted only over the medium to long term. This is partly due to the fact that perceptions can be 'sticky' and take time to realign with a site's current realities. That said, our statistical analysis indicates that respondents' perceptions do reflect several of the Content and Operations indicators. Adopting the content and operations standards measured in those pillars could have the additional effect of improving perceptions in the eyes of the country's readers.

The Context pillar findings are based on an independent survey³⁶ conducted to measure online users' perceptions of brand trust in the media sites included in our sample for Mexico (see Figure 9). According to the respondents, the websites in the sample do a good job of differentiating the news content from the opinion content, and almost the entirety of the sampled domains achieved a score higher than 70 for this indicator. Furthermore, the survey seems to show that the respondents perceive a fairly high level of news accuracy across the sample, as the resulting scores for this indicator suggest (ranging from 60 to 78). In fact, all Mexican sites score above the pillar average when it comes to the perceived accuracy of the sites' content, along with the differentiation between news and opinion content.

On the other hand, the perception survey revealed that respondents perceive a moderate use of clickbait across the sample, as half of the websites score below 60 for the clickbait indicator. Finally, most users are not aware of media outlets issuing corrections, which also resonates with a finding from the Operations pillar; most media outlets evaluated did not publish a policy to issue corrections.

Still, the findings for the site sample show that, overall, most informed online readers generally perceive the sites to be equal when assessed according to the full range of the Context pillar indicators which are used to measure brand trust (see Figure 10).

Figure 9. Average Context pillar scores by indicator

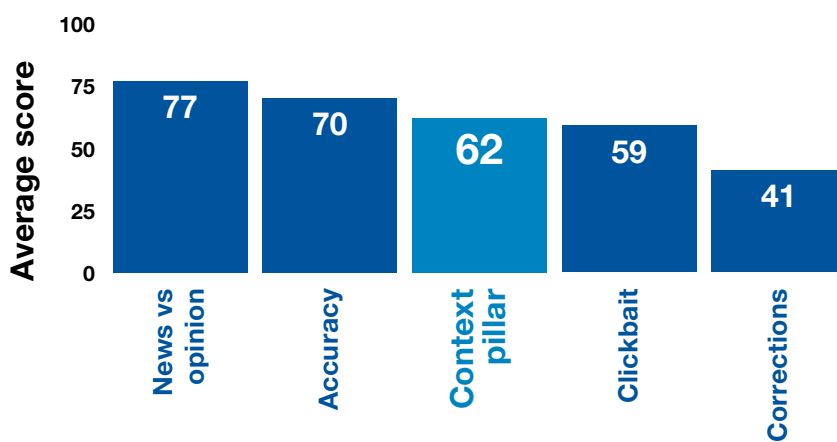
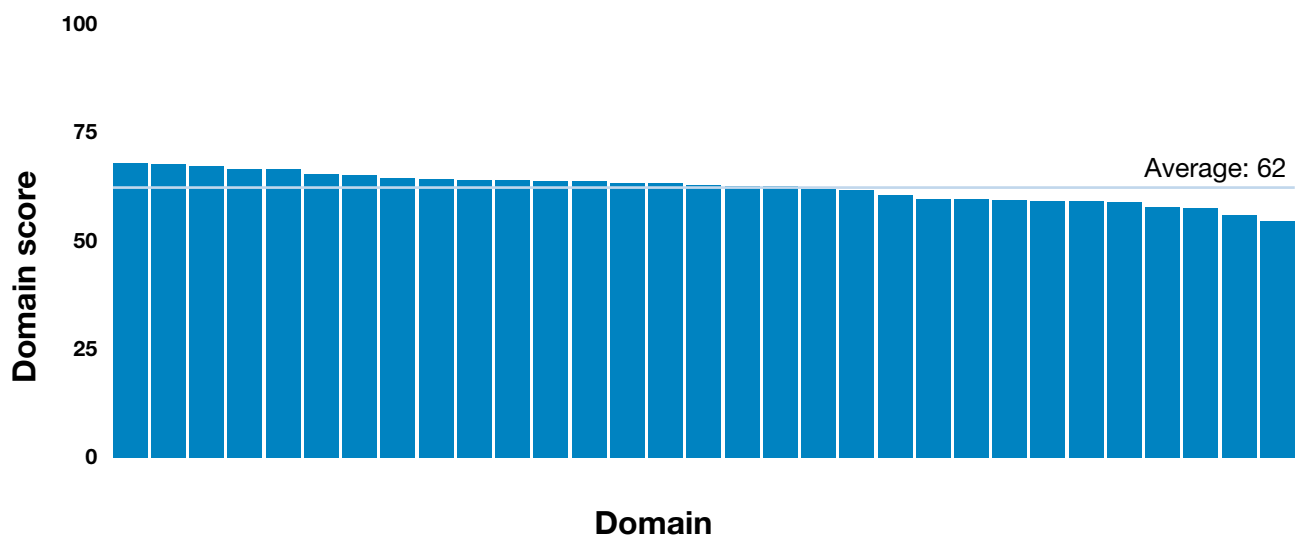


Figure 10. Context pillar scores by site



Conclusion

Our assessment of the disinformation risk of news sites in Mexico finds a rather similar set of risk scores across the sample.

Only one site scores in the low-disinformation range and there were no sites classified as minimum-risk. Four out of five sites (80 percent of media outlets) present a medium disinformation risk, while five show a high disinformation risk.

The low scores obtained by the websites on operational checks and balances signal the risk of potential conflicts of interests, and the documented perverse relationship between media owners and politicians faced by old and new media outlets alike. However, this is also the area with the highest potential for mitigating disinformation risk if policies and practices were to be strengthened.

Mexican news sites could address many of these operational shortcomings by:

- Clearly explaining their sources of revenue. Given the recent history of local governments funding local media sites, this information is crucial to rebuild trust in the media;
- Publishing their ownership structure, and the names of key staff and the editor-in-chief;
- Adopting a public statement of editorial independence and policies to mitigate conflicts of interest;
- Establishing transparent policies about a site's fact-checking processes (prior to and after publishing), and labelling news and opinion content;
- Publishing policies on how to adequately and transparently disseminate corrections;
- Making transparent any policies regarding the attribution of stories, facts, and media to help rebuild trust in the media;
- Establishing and enforcing policies to reduce disinformation in user-generated content.

Media outlets in Mexico have a long history of being used by political elites for their own purposes.³⁷ In order to consolidate a free, independent press, it is necessary to tackle all of the disinformation risks which we have identified. As various experts have indicated, the independence of and trust in Mexican journalists is fundamental for the consolidation of Mexico's most recent experience with democracy.³⁸ With this report we aim to help media organisations avoid disinformation risks to benefit Mexican citizens and the country's democratic processes.

Appendix: Methodology

Pillar scoring

The Global Disinformation Index evaluates the level of disinformation risk of a country's online media market. The country's online media market is represented by a sample of 30 to 35 news domains that are selected on the basis of their Alexa rankings, their number of social media followers, and the expertise of local researchers. The resulting sample features major national news sites with high levels of online engagement, news sites that reflect the regional, linguistic and cultural composition of the country, and news sites that influence ideas among local decision-makers, groups or actors.

The index is composed of three pillars: Content, Operations, and Context. The three pillars are, in turn, composed of several indicators. The Content pillar includes indicators that assess elements and characteristics of each domain's content to capture its level of credibility, sensationalism, and impartiality. The Operations pillar's indicators evaluate the policies and rules that a specific domain establishes to ensure the reliability and quality of the news being published. These policies concern, for instance, conflicts of interest, accurate reporting and accountability. The Context pillar relies on indicators that measure the perceived credibility and reliability of news-related information published by each domain.

Each of the GDI's media market risk assessments is conducted in collaboration with a local team of media and disinformation experts who develop the media list for the market sample, contribute to the sampling frame for the content included in the Content pillar review, conduct the data collection for the Content and Operations pillars, vet and interpret the index results, and draft the market report.

Site selection

The market sample for the study is developed based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative criteria. GDI begins by creating a list of the 50 news websites with the greatest traffic in the media market. This list is provided to the country research team, along with data on the number of Facebook and Twitter followers for each site, to gauge relevance and reach. The local research team then reduces the list to 35 sites, ensuring that the sample provides adequate geographic, linguistic and political coverage to capture the major media discourses in the market. International news outlets are generally excluded, because their risk ratings are assessed in the market from which they originate.³⁹ News aggregators are also excluded, so that all included sites are assessed on their original content. The final media market sample reflects the complete set of between 30 to 35 sites for which complete data could be collected throughout the review process.

Data collection

The Content indicators are based on the review of a sample of ten articles published by each domain. Five of these articles are randomly selected from a domain's most frequently shared articles on Facebook within a two-week period. The remaining five articles are randomly selected from a group of a domain's articles covering topics that are likely to carry disinformation narratives. The topics, and the associated set of keywords used to identify them, are jointly developed by GDI and the in-country research team. Each country team contributes narrative topics and the keywords used to identify them in the local media discourse to GDI's global topic classifier list, developed by GDI's data science and intelligence teams. Country teams also manually verify the machine translation of the entire topic list into the relevant study languages.

The sampled articles are anonymised by stripping them of any information that allows the analysts to identify the publisher or the author of the articles. The anonymised content is reviewed by two country analysts who are trained on the GDI codebook. For each anonymised article, the country analysts answer a set of 13 questions aimed at evaluating the elements and characteristics of the article and its headline, in terms of bias, sensationalism and negative targeting. The analysts subsequently review how the article is presented on the domain and the extent to which the domain provides information on the author's byline and timeline. While performing the Content pillar's reviews, the analysts are required to provide a thorough explanation and gather evidence to support their decisions.

The Operations pillar is based on the information gathered during the manual assessment of each domain performed by the country analysts. The country analysts answer a set of 98 questions aimed at evaluating each domain's ownership, management and funding structure, editorial independence, principles and guidelines, attribution policies, error-correction and fact-checking policies, and rules and policies for the comments section. The analysts gather evidence to support their assessments as they perform each Operations pillar's review.

The Context pillar is based on a public perception survey conducted by an international internet-based market research and data analytics organisation. This external organisation creates and disseminates a survey among informed readers in the media market in the relevant study languages. The survey seeks to capture the perceived quality and reliability of the content published by each domain, along with a set of country-specific control variables.

Data analysis and indicator construction

The data gathered by the country analysts for the Content pillar are used to compute nine indicators. The Content pillar's indicators included in the final risk rating are: article bias, byline information, common coverage, headline accuracy, lead present, negative targeting, recent coverage, sensational language, and visual presentation. For each indicator, values are normalised to a scale of zero to 100. The domain-level score for each indicator in this pillar is the average score obtained across the ten articles. The pillar score for each domain is the average of all the scores for all of the pillar's indicators, and ranges from zero to 100.

For the Operations pillar, the answers of the country analysts are translated into a set of sub-indicators. The six indicators are calculated as the averages of these sub-indicator scores. The resulting Operations pillar's indicators are: attribution, comment policies, editorial principles and practices, ensuring accuracy, funding, and ownership. For each indicator, values are normalised to a scale of zero to 100. The domain score for the Operations pillar is the average score across indicators.

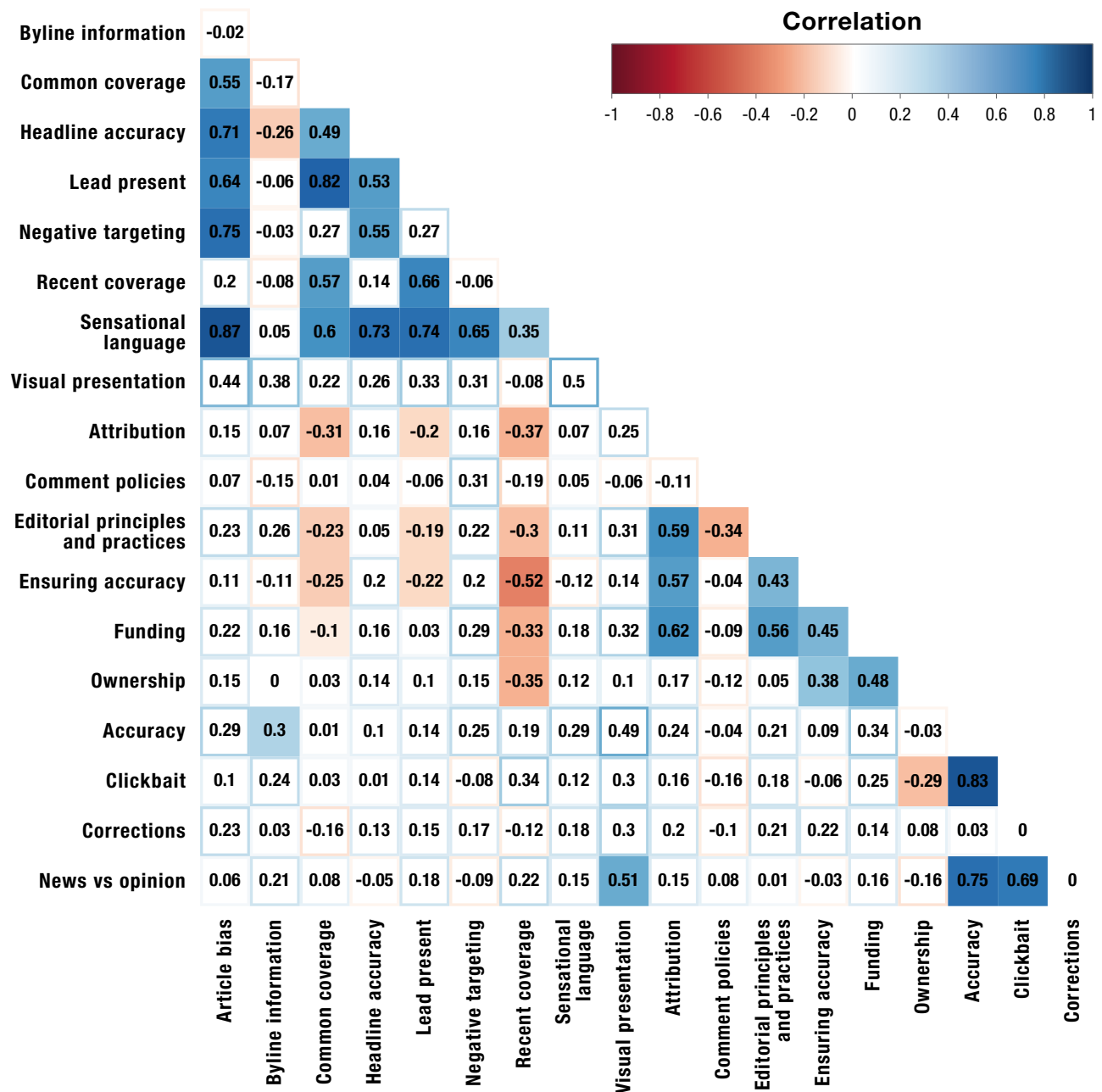
The answers to the perception survey are transmitted to GDI as a dataset, which is used to compute the indicators for the Context pillar. The Context pillar captures four indicators: accuracy, clear differentiation between news and opinion articles, use of clickbait titles, and error reporting. The total score for each domain in this pillar can range from zero to 100, based on an average score across indicators.

Table 2. Global Disinformation Index pillars and indicators

| Pillar | Indicator | Sub-indicators | Unit of analysis | Definition | Rationale |
|------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|---|---|
| Content | Headline accuracy | None | Article | Rating for how accurately the story's headline describes the content of the story | Indicative of clickbait |
| | Byline information | | | Rating for how much information is provided in the article's byline | Attribution of stories creates accountability for their veracity |
| | Lead present | | | Rating for whether the article begins with a fact-based lead | Indicative of fact-based reporting and high journalistic standards |
| | Common coverage | | | Rating for whether the same event has been covered by at least one other reliable local media outlet | Indicative of a true event |
| | Recent coverage | | | Rating for whether the story covers a news event or development that occurred within 30 days prior to the article's publication date | Indicative of a newsworthy event, rather than one which has been taken out of context |
| | Negative targeting | | | Rating for whether the story negatively targets a specific individual or group | Indicative of hate speech, bias or an adversarial narrative |
| | Article bias | | | Rating for the degree of bias in the article | Indicative of neutral, fact-based reporting or well-rounded analysis |
| | Sensational language | | | Rating for the degree of sensationalism in the article | Indicative of neutral, fact-based reporting or well-rounded analysis |
| | Visual presentation | | | Rating for the degree of sensationalism in the visual presentation of the article | Indicative of neutral, fact-based reporting or well-rounded analysis |
| Operations | Attribution | None | Domain | Rating for the number of policies and practices identified on the site | Assesses policies regarding the attribution of stories, facts, and media (either publicly or anonymously); indicative of policies that ensure accurate facts, authentic media, and accountability for stories |
| | Comment policies | Policies | | Rating for the number of policies identified on the site | Assesses policies to reduce disinformation in user-generated content |
| | | Moderation | | Rating for the mechanisms to enforce comment policies identified on the site | Assesses the mechanism to enforce policies to reduce disinformation in user-generated content |
| | Editorial principles and practices | Editorial independence | | Rating for the number of policies identified on the site | Assesses the degree of editorial independence and the policies in place to mitigate conflicts of interest |
| | | Adherence to narrative | | Rating for the degree to which the site is likely to adhere to an ideological affiliation, based on its published editorial positions | Indicative of politicised or ideological editorial decision-making |
| | | Content guidelines | | Rating for the number of policies identified on the site | Assesses the policies in place to ensure that factual information is reported without bias |
| | | News vs. analysis | | Rating for the number of policies and practices identified on the site | Assesses the policies in place to ensure that readers can distinguish between news and opinion content |
| | Ensuring accuracy | Pre-publication fact-checking | | Rating for the number of policies and practices identified on the site | Assesses policies to ensure that only accurate information is reported |
| | | Post-publication corrections | | Rating for the number of policies and practices identified on the site | Assesses policies to ensure that needed corrections are disseminated adequately and transparently |
| | Funding | Diversified incentive structure | | Rating for the number of revenue sources identified on the site | Indicative of possible conflicts of interest stemming from over-reliance on one or few sources of revenue |
| | | Accountability to readership | | Rating based on whether reader subscriptions or donations are identified as a revenue source | Indicative of accountability for high-quality information over content that drives ad revenue |
| | | Transparent funding | | Rating based on the degree of transparency the site provides regarding its sources of funding | Indicative of the transparency that is required to monitor the incentives and conflicts of interest that can arise from opaque revenue sources |
| | Ownership | Owner-operator division | | Rating based on the number of distinct executive- or board-level financial and editorial decision-makers listed on the site | Indicative of a separation between financial and editorial decision-making, to avoid conflicts of interest |
| | | Transparent ownership | | Rating based on the degree of transparency the site provides regarding its ownership structure | Indicative of the transparency that is required to monitor the incentives and conflicts of interest that can arise from opaque ownership structures |
| Context | Accuracy | None | Domain | Respondent rating for perceived level of accuracy in covering news events | Assesses accuracy of the site's content without the need to directly fact-check |
| | Clickbait | | | Respondent rating for perceived use of clickbait headlines | Assesses the site's use of clickbait |
| | News vs. opinion | | | Respondent rating for ability to differentiate between opinion and news articles | Assesses how well the site communicates the difference between fact and opinion to its readers |
| | Corrections | | | Respondent rating for perceived frequency of issuing corrections in response to errors | Assesses the site's credibility in terms of issuing corrections |

Figure 11 visualises the relationships between each of the GDI indicators in the Mexican media market.

Figure 11. Correlations matrix, GDI indicators, Mexican media market



*Note: Statistically significant correlations are highlighted.

Risk ratings

The overall index score for each domain is the average of the pillar scores. The domains are then classified on the basis of a five-category risk scale based on the overall index score. The risk categories were defined based on the distribution of risk ratings from 180 sites across six media markets in September 2020. This

cross-country dataset was standardised to fit a normal distribution with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. The standardised scores and their distance from the mean were used to determine the bands for each risk level, given in Table 3. These bands are then used to categorise the risk levels for sites in each subsequent media market analysis.

Table 3. Disinformation risk levels

| Risk level | Lower limit | Upper limit | Distribution |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------------|
| Minimum risk | 76.17 | 100 | > 1.5 SD from mean |
| Low risk | 63.89 | 76.16 | > 0.5 and ≤ 1.5 SD from mean |
| Medium risk | 51.60 | 63.88 | > -0.5 and ≤ 0.5 SD from mean |
| High risk | 39.32 | 51.59 | ≥ -1.5 and ≤ -0.5 SD from mean |
| Maximum risk | 0 | 39.31 | < -1.5 SD from mean |

Endnotes

- 1 We define disinformation in terms of the verb ‘to disinform’: ‘to deliberately mislead; opposite of inform’.
- 2 The human review elements of the framework were developed in collaboration with Alexandra Mousavizadeh (head of insights for Tortoise Media and co-founder of the GDI). The framework was advised by, vetted by, and finalised with the support of a technical advisory group (TAG), including Ben Nimmo (Facebook), Camille François (Graphika), Miguel Martinez (co-founder & chief data scientist, Signal AI), Nic Newman (Reuters Institute of Journalism), Olaf Steenfadt, (Reporters without Borders), Cristina Tardáguila (Lupa), Amy Mitchell (Pew Research), Scott Hale (Meedan and Credibility Coalition), Finn Heinrich (OSF) and Laura Zommer (Chequeado).
- 3 For more on our methodology, see the appendix and methodology at: <https://disinformationindex.org/research/>.
- 4 In 2021, media market assessments will be produced for the following countries: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, Italy, Malaysia, Nigeria and Spain. Additional countries may also be added.
- 5 All sites included in the report were informed of their individual scores and risk ratings, as well as the overall market averages.
- 6 Two researchers assessed each site and indicator. The survey of 508 respondents was conducted by YouGov between 25 February and 8 March 2021. All respondents answered a standard set of questions used by the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) in all countries where it conducts risk ratings. Each respondent provided their perceptions of brand trust and credibility for up to 10 sites that they said they were ‘familiar’ with.
- 7 Minimal risk is the best risk rating, followed by a low-risk rating. Both ratings suggest a news site that has scored well across all of the indicators. For all countries, individual site scores were shared confidentially with the site operators to allow for engagement, feedback and any necessary changes. All sites were contacted in advance to provide them with information on the methodology and rating process. In all countries covered by the risk ratings, the composite scores are shared only for the sites assessed to have a low or minimal disinformation risk. As a result, the number of sites disclosed in the report will vary by country.
- 8 The GDI looks forward to working with the entire industry in this effort. There is strong demand for such a risk assessment of sites, and a notable concern that less trusted, less independent actors may seek to fill this gap.
- 9 This is based on engagement metrics: Animalpolítico.com ranks 260 on Alexa (for Mexican sites) and has 2.3 million Twitter followers and 1.4 million Facebook followers; Aristeguinoticias.com ranks 269 on Alexa (for Mexican sites) and has 8.7 million Twitter followers and 7.5 million Facebook followers; and Unotv.com ranks 214 on Alexa (for Mexican sites) and has over 365,000 Twitter followers and 2.1 million Facebook followers. All numbers are based on statistics from April 2021.
- 10 Based on findings from the Reuters Institute’s Digital News Report. See: <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2020/mexico-2020/>.
- 11 Newman, N., R. Fletcher, A. Schulz, S. Andi, and R. K. Nielsen, (2020), *Reuters Institute Digital News Report, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism* (p. 93).
- 12 Newman, N., R. Fletcher, A. Schulz, S. Andi, and R. K. Nielsen, (2020), *Reuters Institute Digital News Report, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism* (p. 47).
- 13 Guttman, A. (2021), *Advertising industry in Mexico – Statistics & Facts*. Last retrieved: May 2021, <https://www.statista.com/topics/4787/advertising-industry-in-mexico/#dossierSummary>.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Research and Markets, (2020) *Digital Advertising in Mexico – Report*, MarketLine, April 2020.
- 16 See: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/209112/number-of-internet-users-per-100-inhabitants-in-mexico-since-2000/>.
- 17 Newman, N., R. Fletcher, A. Schulz, S. Andi, and R. K. Nielsen, (2020), *Reuters Institute digital news report 2020* and Kemp, S., (2019), *Digital 2019: Mexico*. Last retrieved: May 2021, <https://www.slideshare.net/DataReportal/digital-2019-mexico-en-january-2019-v01>.
- 18 See: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/209112/number-of-internet-users-per-100-inhabitants-in-mexico-since-2000/>.

- 19 See: <https://mexico.mom-rsf.org/en/> ; for a historical overview, see: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1870057816300270>.
- 20 See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/25/world/americas/mexico-press-government-advertising.html>.
- 21 For information on spending in the first year of the AMLO government, see: <https://articulo19.org/primer-ano-de-gobierno-de-amlo-el-gasto-en-publicidad-oficial-a-la-baja-pero-persisten-las-malas-practicas/>.
- 22 See: <https://mexico.mom-rsf.org/en/findings/public-advertising/>.
- 23 See: <https://www.cima.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/WAN%20IFRA%20-%20Mexico.pdf>.
- 24 Ibid. See also: https://www.cjr.org/business_of_news/mexico-government-newspaper-advertising.php/.
- 25 For instance, Mexican politicians joined the global trend of trying to influence elections by outsourcing their campaigns to public relations firms. One example is the reelection campaign of Julián Zacarías, the current mayor of the Mexican city of Progreso, to denigrate his opponent, Lila Frías Castillo. This effort was led by a public relations firm in Mexico linked to Zacarías himself, which created and managed several Facebook pages and accounts that appeared to be independent local news organizations. Source: Vavra, S. (2021), *Facebook is observing a 'steady growth' in disinformation-for-hire services*, 11/05/2021.
- 26 Rocha, J.A. (2020), *Mexico most dangerous country for journalists: Report*, Anadolu Agency, 23/12/2020.
- 27 Article 19 (2020), *Distorsión: El discurso contra la realidad*, Informe anual 2020. Last retrieved: May 2021, <https://articulo19.org/distorsion/>.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 See: <https://rsf.org/en/mexico>.
- 30 See: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1870057816300270>.
- 31 See: <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2020/mexico-2020/>.
- 32 This sampling process is designed to select articles that concern topics which are frequently associated with polarizing discussions and/or disinformation campaigns. The general topics are selected on the basis of GDI internal research and monitoring work. The keyword list includes more than 170 keywords associated with more than 20 topics. The topic list is discussed further in the Methodology section of this report.
- 33 The Operations pillar looks at whether relevant policies are in place. It does not assess the level of robustness of the policy based on good practice and does not look at how the policies are being implemented. However, other indicators in the framework do capture some of the relevant practices, such as by measuring perceptions of how often sites correct errors or are viewed as presenting accurate content.
- 34 For more information on the JTI, which has adopted an ISO standard for the industry, please see: <https://jti-rsf.org/en/>.
- 35 See: <https://www.cen.eu/news/workshops/Pages/WS-2019-013.aspx>.
- 36 The survey was commissioned and conducted from 25 February to 8 March 2021 by YouGov. All respondents answered a standard set of questions used by the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) in all countries where it conducts risk ratings. Each respondent provided their perceptions of brand trust and credibility for up to 10 sites that they said they were 'familiar' with. There were 508 respondents in total.
- 37 MOM (2020), *Give & Take: How Government Advertising Corrupts Media Freedom*, Media Ownership Monitor – Mexico. Last retrieved: May 2021, <https://mexico.mom-rsf.org/en/findings/public-advertising/>. Ahmed, A. (2017), *Using Billions in Government Cash, Mexico Controls News Media*, New York Times, 25/12/2017.
- 38 For example, see: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1870057816300270>; https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/lap_specialreport.media1.pdf; and https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FP_20190315_mexico_felbab_brown.pdf.
- 39 In select cases, international news outlets may be included in a study if the domestic market is small, the sites are considered highly relevant, the content on the site is specific to the market assessed, and GDI has not developed a risk rating for that site elsewhere.



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