



## Country Report

# Journalists in Ethiopia

Terje Skjerdal, *NLA University College*

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## Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Ethiopia is male, 30 years old and holds an undergraduate degree in journalism or communication. Of the 350 interviewed journalists, 101 were women, making for a proportion of 28.9 percent of the overall sample. On average, Ethiopian journalists were 30.4 years old ( $s=6.84$ ); less than 10 percent were 40 years or older. Journalists tend to be well educated: 97.4 percent have obtained a university degree, with 88.0 percent having completed a bachelor's degree and 9.4 percent a master's degree. 56.6 percent of those who held a university degree had specialized in journalism and/or communication. 32.1 percent of the interviewed journalists had specialized in a field related to their area of coverage.

## Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Ethiopia held a full-time position (93.7%). Only 1.7 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 4.3 percent worked as freelance journalists.

Generally speaking, Ethiopian journalists have short professional experience. On average, the respondents had worked as journalists for 5.2 years ( $s=4.63$ ). More than 90 percent had less than ten years of experience in the profession. Most journalists reported on a variety of subjects (75.1%), whereas 24.9% worked on a specific desk such as economy, sports or entertainment. The vast majority (97.4%) worked for only one newsroom. 15.3% had additional paid jobs outside of journalism. 16.3% were members of a professional association.

The majority of the journalists in the sample worked for the broadcasting media; 68.0% contributed to either radio or television, or both. Furthermore, 24.6% worked for print media outlets, 7.1% worked for news agencies, and only 0.3% worked for stand-alone online news sites. Overall, 80.0% of the interviewed Ethiopian journalists worked for the state media, while 20.0% worked for private media organizations.

## Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, Ethiopian journalists found it most important to support national development, promote tolerance and cultural diversity, provide analysis of current affairs, and educate the audience (see Table 1). The relevance of these roles was fairly undisputed among the interviewed journalists as the relatively low standard deviations indicate.

The least valued role among the interviewed journalists was to be an adversary of the government (20.2% saying “extremely” or “very important”). On the same note, around half of the respondents found it important to support government policy and convey a positive image of the political leadership. However, these and similar roles triggered relatively high standard deviations, indicating that the journalist population is split on politically inclined roles orientations.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Support national development	345	86.7	4.38	.95
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	350	85.7	4.41	.96
Provide analysis of current affairs	348	85.6	4.25	.90
Educate the audience	348	84.8	4.32	.84
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	349	81.7	4.23	1.03
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	349	80.8	4.25	1.02
Advocate for social change	346	79.8	4.13	.98
Let people express their views	347	79.0	4.14	1.09
Tell stories about the world	350	74.9	4.09	.96
Provide information people need to make political decisions	348	74.1	4.03	1.11
Provide entertainment and relaxation	349	70.8	3.98	1.03
Motivate people to participate in political activity	345	67.8	3.85	1.15
Report things as they are	348	66.4	3.84	1.28
Monitor and scrutinize business	346	58.4	3.53	1.25
Be a detached observer	345	58.0	3.15	1.36
Support government policy	340	56.5	3.51	1.31
Convey a positive image of political leadership	337	49.0	3.30	1.37
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	341	47.5	3.25	1.34
Influence public opinion	340	47.4	3.17	1.44
Set the political agenda	339	45.7	3.15	1.33
Be an adversary of the government	312	20.2	2.27	1.36

Question: Please tell me how important each of these things is in your work. 5 means you find them extremely important, 4 means very important, 3 means somewhat important, 2 means little importance, and 1 means unimportant.

## Professional Ethics

A relatively high proportion of the interviewed Ethiopian journalists supported contextual and situational ethics. More than half said it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it and claimed that what is ethical depends on the specific situation (see Table 2). One third said that what is ethical is a matter of personal judgment. However, the standard deviations are relatively high for all questions asked regarding ethical orientations, which demonstrates that there was limited agreement among the journalists on ethical principles.

Table 2: Ethical orientations of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "strongly" and "somewhat agree"	Mean	Standard Deviation
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	339	60.2	3.53	1.40
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	343	55.7	3.27	1.45
Journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context	345	48.7	3.11	1.53
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	338	34.6	2.59	1.48

Question: The following statements describe different approaches to journalism. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree. 5 means you strongly agree, 4 means somewhat agree, 3 means undecided, 2 means somewhat disagree, and 1 means strongly disagree.

The picture is mixed in regard to various potentially controversial reporting techniques. A considerable proportion of the interviewed Ethiopian journalists found it justifiable to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story (see Table 3). A practice which has been much discussed in African media circles lately, so-called 'brown envelope journalism' (receiving money from sources when on a reporting assignment), was found to be among the least accepted reporting methods among the interviewed Ethiopian journalists.

Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists

	N	Percentage saying "always justified"	Percentage saying "justified on occasion"
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	344	11.9	28.2
Claiming to be somebody else	334	7.8	32.6
Publishing stories with unverified content	341	4.7	6.2
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	348	4.6	9.2
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	335	4.2	29.9
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	341	4.1	26.7
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	343	4.1	16.6
Altering photographs	343	3.8	11.4
Accepting money from sources	340	3.5	11.8
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	334	3.3	19.2
Paying people for confidential information	331	2.7	25.7
Using hidden microphones or cameras	341	2.6	36.7

Question: Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?

## Professional Autonomy and Influences

Journalists in Ethiopia reported medium to low levels of professional autonomy. Less than half of the respondents (47.3%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in selecting which stories to work on. Likewise, 47.1% said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding what aspects to emphasize in a news story. A similar number reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) “always” or “very often” (51.0%).

Ethiopian journalists sense influence from many agents and sources. Access to information, editorial policy and time limits were rated as the three most significant sources of influence in the journalists’ work. Furthermore, factors that would typically be regarded as politically inclined in Ethiopia, such as media legislation and editorial management, were perceived as key influences in the news production as well.

Persons outside of official relations, such as colleagues in other media and friends, acquaintances and family, were regarded as the least important sources of influence by the interviewed journalists.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Information access	348	73.0%	3.93	1.06
Editorial policy	349	71.1%	3.97	1.22
Time limits	344	68.3%	3.78	1.10
Media laws and regulation	346	67.1%	3.80	1.15
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	347	63.4%	3.84	1.14
Journalism ethics	345	62.9%	3.62	1.29
Owners of the news organization	335	61.8%	3.71	1.34
Managers of the news organization	346	60.7%	3.76	1.24
Availability of news-gathering resources	344	58.7%	3.65	1.06
Government officials	344	56.4%	3.63	1.40
Censorship	340	52.9%	3.41	1.45
Competing news organizations	344	48.3%	3.30	1.25
Politicians	340	47.6%	3.35	1.42
Your personal values and beliefs	340	46.2%	3.40	1.28
Relationships with news sources	341	45.5%	3.26	1.20
Religious considerations	287	43.9%	3.07	1.46
Military, police and state security	323	43.3%	3.11	1.57
Audience research and data	336	40.5%	3.14	1.24
Feedback from the audience	340	39.7%	3.21	1.14
Public relations	338	34.3%	3.04	1.19
Profit expectations	313	31.9%	2.80	1.30
Your peers on the staff	345	31.3%	2.97	1.13
Pressure groups	340	30.9%	2.85	1.39
Advertising considerations	318	28.9%	2.68	1.33
Business people	341	28.7%	2.75	1.34
Friends, acquaintances and family	347	18.4%	2.42	1.22
Colleagues in other media	343	17.2%	2.27	1.20

Question: Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work. 5 means it is extremely influential, 4 means very influential, 3 means somewhat influential, 2 means little influential, and 1 means not influential.

## Journalism in Transition

Journalism is in a state of change. According to Ethiopian journalists, the most profound changes over the past five years were found in two areas: the use of new media technology, and the importance of education. The use of search engines and technical skills had increased, and so had the importance of having a university degree, in the opinion of the interviewed journalists (see Table 5). On the other hand, a notable proportion of the journalists were concerned that the credibility of journalism in the country had decreased (every third journalist claimed that this was the case). Still, a slightly higher proportion thought that the profession’s credibility had rather increased.

Influences on journalism and news production have changed as well. Most notably, more than four out of five Ethiopian journalists believed that the influence of journalism education in the country had increased in the past five-year period. Similarly, the influence of social media and user-generated content was believed to have increased, as well as competition in the media industry. A relatively lower proportion thought that audience research, pressure towards sensational news and ethical standards had been strengthened, although more journalists still believed that these areas had been strengthened rather than weakened (see Table 6).

The questions about changes in journalism were only presented to journalists who had five years or more of professional experience.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has “increased”	Percentage saying has “decreased”
The use of search engines	137	90.5	5.8
Having a university degree	137	83.7	5.1
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	137	77.4	8.0
Technical skills	137	71.5	11.7
Average working hours of journalists	135	62.2	13.3
The relevance of journalism for society	138	58.0	21.0
Journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions	134	55.2	22.4
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	135	54.8	18.5
The credibility of journalism	136	41.9	35.3
Time available for researching stories	137	41.6	30.7

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in [country]. 5 means they have increased a lot, 4 means they have somewhat increased, 3 means there has been no change, 2 means they have somewhat decreased, and 1 means they have decreased a lot.

Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has “strengthened”	Percentage saying has “weakened”
Journalism education	136	80.9	10.3
Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter	134	77.6	6.7
Competition	139	70.5	7.9
User-generated contents, such as blogs	136	67.6	14.7
Profit making pressures	134	65.7	12.7
Advertising considerations	136	64.0	13.2
Audience feedback	137	62.8	19.0
Public relations	139	62.6	8.6
Western ways of practicing journalism	132	56.8	21.2
Audience involvement in news production	136	54.4	21.3
Ethical standards	138	50.0	26.8
Pressure toward sensational news	131	47.3	22.1
Audience research	136	46.3	22.1

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in [country]. 5 means they have strengthened a lot, 4 means they have somewhat strengthened, 3 means they did not change, 2 means they have somewhat weakened, and 1 means they have weakened a lot.

## Journalistic Trust

Ethiopian journalists expressed concern when it came to trust in various public institutions. Politicians and political parties were particularly distrusted, with only one in ten journalists saying that they had “complete” or “a great deal of trust” in these actors (see Table 7). The police, the judiciary and the government gained relatively higher levels of trust. The highest level of trust, although still moderate, was expressed to the parliament, religious leaders and the military. However, even the most trusted institutions were approved by less than half of the respondents. The journalists’ own institution, the news media, were trusted by every third respondent. It should be noted that the questions about trust had high standard deviations, which indicates that the journalist population is divided when it comes to their view of public institutions. The government, the parliament and religious leaders received particularly diverse responses, indicating that there is little agreement among media professionals to what extent these institutions should be trusted.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying “complete” and “a great deal of trust”	Mean	Standard Deviation
The military	246	43.5	3.36	1.24
Religious leaders	246	41.9	3.02	1.40
The parliament	254	38.2	2.99	1.37
The news media	250	36.4	3.15	1.10
The government	252	31.7	2.85	1.35
The judiciary/the courts	250	30.4	2.95	1.22
The police	251	27.9	2.92	1.15
Trade unions	241	19.1	2.73	1.00
Politicians in general	251	11.2	2.28	1.01
Political parties	252	10.3	2.23	1.02

Question: Please tell me on a scale of 5 to 1 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions. 5 means you have complete trust, 4 means you have a great deal of trust, 3 means you have some trust, 2 means you have little trust, and 1 means you have no trust at all.

### Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	Approx. 1600 working journalists
<i>Sampling method:</i>	Stratified random sampling on media organization level, convenience sampling on journalists’ level
<i>Sample size:</i>	350
<i>Interview methods:</i>	Face-to-face interviews
<i>Response rate:</i>	85% (estimated)
<i>Period of field research:</i>	March 2013 to September 2015