

Cuba

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INTRODUCTION

Cuba is facing a complex political, economic, and social crisis marked by a prolonged structural downturn and tightened unilateral, coercive sanctions imposed by the United States, affecting nearly all aspects of daily life. Shortages of basic goods, deteriorating public services, and growing inequality have intensified public frustration, while a historic wave of migration reflects increasing disengagement from the socialist project.

Cuba's journalistic tradition has long operated within a state-centered model subordinated to the revolutionary government and the Communist Party. Despite this, academic and professional communities, particularly within universities, have fostered critical thinking about journalism's roles, ethics, and its relationship with the public, laying the groundwork for more reflexive approaches to media practice.

Today, journalism in Cuba is marked by a polycrisis: precarious working conditions, shrinking institutional space for criticism, a growing disconnect with audiences, and the rise of an unrecognized independent press subject to sanctions, censorship, and political stigmatization. In this context, many journalists resort to thematic displacement, multiple jobs or career changes, or even exile as strategies to safeguard their autonomy, personal safety and economic survival.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The sample of Cuban journalists is balanced in terms of gender: 54.8% were female and 42.3% were male. It is a young population, on average, 34.7 years old (SD = 10.6; Median = 32). They are generally well educated: 68.8% of them held a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, 18.7% a Master's degree or equivalent, and an additional 4.7% have obtained a doctorate. Moreover, 92.4% of the respondents have acquired formal education or professional training in journalism. This education or training is usually obtained at university or in college (85.5%) but also via apprenticeships or cadetships (37.2%) and short-term courses (41.6%).

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In terms of the background of their main employer, approximately two in five journalists in Cuba worked for TV (20.6 %) or newspaper (19.1 %) organizations, 17.1% for radio outlets, 16.5% for native media, 15.3% for magazine companies, and 7.9% for news agencies. Only 3.5% of the interviewed journalists claimed not to have a main employer. Regarding area of coverage, 55.1% of the journalists reported they mainly worked for (trans)national media, while 41.4% primarily catered to local or regional media.

On average, Cuban journalists had 9.8 years of professional experience (SD = 8.4; Median = 8). A majority of them (74.6%) worked on a variety of beats or subject areas rather than on a single one. More than a half of Cuba journalists (59.8%) were members of professional associations.

More than three-quarters of the interviewed journalists in Cuba had a full-time contract (65.9% permanently and 11.4% temporarily employed). A tenth of them (11.4 %) worked as freelancers or were self-employed, and an additional 1.2% had other forms of employment. Finally, 7.3% had a part-time permanent contract, and 2.6% had a part-time temporary contract. These results suggest a contradictory employment situation, as does the fact that 35.3% of the respondents reported that they had additional jobs outside journalism.

The average working week of Cuban journalists was 43.0 hours (SD = 13.6; Median = 40; for those in full-time employment). Relatedly, almost two thirds (63.8%) of the respondents reported they felt stressed out at work often or very often during the previous six months; only 11.7% had never or rarely felt that way.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Questioning of personal morality, surveillance, demeaning or hateful speech, public discrediting and hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites fared among the most common safety threats experienced by Cuban journalists (see Table 1). However, despite experienced less frequently, experiences of more dangerous threats, such as coercion and disseminating personal information, are worrying. These experiences also impact the concerns expressed by Cuban journalists; more than half were concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing, and almost a quarter were concerned about losing their job (see Table 2). Moreover, two thirds all of the surveyed journalists feared that those who harm journalists would go unpunished.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	343	3.5%	9.3%	23.6%	16.3%	47.2%
Public discrediting of your work	343	2.9%	5.5%	16.3%	14.9%	60.3%
Surveillance	343	7.0%	6.4%	14.9%	11.4%	60.3%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	343	3.2%	7.9%	16.0%	10.2%	62.7%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	343	1.2%	1.7%	2.0%	2.0%	93.0%
Legal actions against you because of your work	343	0.6%	1.5%	2.9%	3.5%	91.5%
Stalking	343	3.5%	4.7%	8.5%	8.7%	74.6%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	343	2.6%	4.7%	12.5%	13.7%	66.5%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	343	0.9%	1.5%	3.5%	4.4%	89.8%
Other physical attacks	343	0.9%	0.3%	1.2%	2.3%	95.3%
Coercion	343	1.5%	4.4%	8.7%	10.5%	74.9%
Questioning of your personal morality	343	6.4%	7.9%	15.5%	16.0%	54.2%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	343	0.0%	0.6%	3.2%	7.3%	88.9%
Others disseminating your personal information	343	1.7%	2.3%	6.7%	7.6%	81.6%
Workplace bullying	342	1.7%	1.2%	5.2%	8.5%	83.4%
Abductions	343	0.9%	0.0%	0.6%	2.6%	95.9%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	343	0.3%	0.3%	0.6%	3.8%	95.0%
Intimidation that targets family	343	1.2%	0.9%	3.5%	4.4%	90.1%

Question: "In the last five years, how often have you experienced any of the following actions related to your work as a journalist?"

TABLE 2. WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Worried about losing job in journalism within the next 12 months	343	24.2%	2.29	1.36
Concerned about physical well-being	343	16.9%	2.08	1.21
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	343	55.4%	3.18	1.40
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Cuba go unpunished	343	68.8%	3.73	1.40

Question: "Thinking about your work, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

JOURNALISTIC ROLES

Cuban journalists showed strong support for informative, civic and public service roles, while more traditional approaches remain relevant but less appreciated (see Table 3). Politically assertive and entertainment roles were among the least valued ones. Even in those cases, significant portions (around a quarter or more) of the interviewed journalists considered these roles extremely or very important.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	343	63.8%	3.60	1.20
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	342	49.1%	3.26	1.31
Shine a light on society's problems	343	83.7%	4.31	0.95
Motivate people to participate in politics	343	25.7%	2.83	1.12
Provide analysis of current affairs	343	84.8%	4.35	0.77
Let people express their views	343	81.9%	4.25	0.85
Provide information people need to form political opinion	343	81.9%	4.18	0.95
Advocate for social change	343	60.1%	3.64	1.15
Influence public opinion	343	66.2%	3.85	0.98
Set the political agenda	342	38.9%	3.14	1.21
Promote peace and tolerance	343	71.4%	4.06	1.02
Educate the audience	343	79.3%	4.19	0.90
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	343	74.9%	3.98	0.97
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	343	72.9%	3.97	1.08
Support national development	343	72.9%	3.95	1.06
Support government policy	342	56.1%	3.42	1.20
Convey a positive image of political leaders	342	24.6%	2.35	1.36
Provide entertainment and relaxation	343	30.0%	2.90	1.16
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	343	53.9%	3.46	1.26
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	343	44.3%	3.24	1.17
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	343	74.6%	4.01	.998
Discuss future implications of current events	343	64.1%	3.78	1.11
Support efforts to protect public health	343	86.3%	4.38	.836
Counteract disinformation	343	74.3%	3.96	1.00
Discuss future implications of current events	343	63.8%	3.60	1.20

Question: "Please tell me how important it is to do each of the following in your daily work." (Scale: 5 = Extremely important; 4 = Very important; 3 = Moderately important; 2 = Slightly important; 1 = Not at all important.)

JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

There was greater disagreement among Cuban journalists regarding their perceptions of journalistic epistemology (see Table 4). Respondents agreed on the importance of valuing interpretation to make sense of facts, alerting audiences about untruthful claims, and making journalists' standpoints transparent in their work.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	343	87.5%	4.30	0.84
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	342	19.9%	2.52	1.15
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	342	54.7%	3.45	1.10
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	343	24.8%	2.50	1.25
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	343	64.4%	3.61	1.07
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	343	32.1%	2.87	1.08
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	343	21.0%	2.68	0.97
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	343	68.5%	3.79	0.89
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	343	31.2%	2.85	1.10
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	343	70.6%	3.85	0.98
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	343	84.5%	4.18	0.89

Questions: "The following statements deal with beliefs related to how journalists know what they know. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree." / "Using the same scale, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following beliefs." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

Journalists in Cuba strongly agreed on the importance of professional standards rather than subjective and situational considerations for ethical reporting (see Table 5). When it comes to the justification of controversial reporting methods, using personal materials without permission, publishing unverified information and accepting money from sources was most strongly rejected (see Table 7). Most journalists found it acceptable to use hidden recording devices and use confidential documents without authorization.

TABLE 5. ETHICAL ORIENTATIONS

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
What is ethical for journalists should always be determined by professional standards regardless of situation and personal judgment	343	76.1%	3.99	1.05
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	342	41.2%	3.04	1.25
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	343	25.7%	2.54	1.27
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	343	11.7%	1.94	1.06

Question: "The following statements describe different responses journalists may have to ethical problems. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

TABLE 6. JUSTIFICATION OF CONTROVERSIAL REPORTING METHODS

	N	Always justified	Justified on occasion
Claiming to be somebody else	343	1.2%	30.0%
Using hidden recording devices	342	1.8%	58.8%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	343	1.7%	47.5%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	343	0.6%	38.5%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	342	0.6%	16.4%
Paying people for confidential information	343	2.0%	25.7%
Accepting money from sources	343	1.2%	3.5%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	343	0.6%	30.3%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	343	0.9%	18.7%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	343	0.0%	6.7%

Question: "Which of the following, if any, do you think may be always justified, or justified on occasion, and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?"

EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

Cuban journalists reported a limited but fair amount of freedom in their work (see Table 7). About two thirds claimed to have complete or a great deal of freedom in selecting their stories and in deciding which aspects to emphasize in a story. Media freedom was rated extremely low by the respondents.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	343	64.4%	3.74	0.86
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	343	62.4%	3.79	0.87
Media freedom in Cuba	343	9.6%	2.65	0.82

(Scale: 5 = Complete freedom; 4 = A great deal of freedom; 3 = Some freedom; 2 = Little freedom; 1 = No freedom at all.)

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Cuban journalists found journalism ethics and editorial policy to fare highest among the internal factors influencing news production (see Table 8). Among the external factors, most journalists considered access to information, feedback from the audience, and relationships with news sources as being extremely or very influential.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	328	36.0%	3.11	1.01
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	337	62.0%	3.67	0.98
The business managers of the news organization	306	34.3%	2.86	1.23
The owners of the news organization	282	44.3%	3.10	1.44
Editorial policy	340	77.4%	4.07	0.90
Advertising considerations	264	9.8%	2.04	1.01
Profit expectations	292	29.1%	2.61	1.33
Audience research and data	313	29.7%	2.89	1.19
Availability of news-gathering resources	330	64.8%	3.74	1.13
Time limits	330	55.2%	3.47	1.18
Journalism ethics	336	83.9%	4.19	0.92
Self-censorship	314	33.1%	2.90	1.28
Personal values and beliefs	327	63.0%	3.72	1.10
Colleagues in other media	330	9.1%	2.41	0.95
Friends, acquaintances and family	336	17.6%	2.51	1.01
Feedback from the audience	341	66.6%	3.69	0.95
Competing news organizations	329	24.3%	2.78	1.05
Media laws and regulation	333	42.9%	3.21	1.15
Access to information	338	76.9%	4.02	1.06
Government censorship	330	47.6%	3.27	1.42
Government officials	324	47.8%	3.21	1.32
Politicians	323	45.8%	3.14	1.38
Business people	309	20.1%	2.39	1.22
Public relations	328	23.8%	2.69	1.13
Relationships with news sources	337	64.1%	3.65	1.17
Police	299	15.7%	2.20	1.21
Issue advocacy groups	298	10.7%	2.05	1.09
Scientists or health experts	311	30.5%	2.70	1.27
Religious groups and institutions	290	7.9%	1.86	0.98
Military	291	15.1%	2.20	1.29
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	267	6.4%	1.55	0.98
Organized crime and criminal groups	255	4.3%	1.41	0.84
Terrorist groups	253	4.0%	1.38	0.83

Question: "Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work as a journalist." (Scale: 5 = Extremely influential; 4 = Very influential; 3 = Moderately influential; 2 = Slightly influential; 1 = Not at all influential.)