

Ecuador¹

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INTRODUCTION

Ecuador continues to face severe political instability, escalating violence, and persistent economic challenges. President Daniel Noboa was re-elected on April 6, 2025, amidst unprecedented violence linked to drug trafficking, resulting in a record-high homicide rate and significant internal displacement. An important event that underscored the nation's instability was the assassination of presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio on August 9, 2023, just eleven days before the general election. This turmoil follows years of political turbulence, notably Rafael Correa's presidency (2007–2017), marked by the establishment and consolidation of a state-owned media conglomerate, epitomized by his emblematic Saturday morning broadcasts (*sabatinas*) and the controversial Communication Law (LOC) (2013); Lenin Moreno's administration (2017–2021), characterised by political betrayals and massive social protests against fuel price hikes (2017–2020); and Guillermo Lasso's brief yet chaotic presidency (2021–2023), ending abruptly amid increasing criminal violence, exemplified by the Ecuadorian prison massacre on February 23, 2021. Economically, the nation remains vulnerable following recurrent crises: the "feriado bancario" of 1999, the global financial crash of 2008, and the devastating COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Ecuadorian journalists historically navigated heavy political pressures and censorship, but the current environment is particularly hostile, marked by assassinations, digital harassment, and self-censorship driven by safety fears. In 2022, three journalists were assassinated, and in 2023, death threats against journalists in Ecuador doubled compared to previous years, with at least 15 journalists receiving death threats, while overall violence escalated, intensifying fears and self-censorship amid growing attacks by organised crime linked to drug trafficking.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Of the Ecuadorian journalists surveyed, 39.5% were female, 59.8% male, and 0.7% identified as other, indicating a notable gender imbalance in favour of men. The mean age was 35.8 years (SD = 9.9; Median = 36). Most respondents had a college or university degree (GED, 74.6%), while 74.9% had completed a journalism apprenticeship or cadetship, and 69.1% had obtained a certificate or diploma from a short-term journalism course. Overall, the sample reflects a highly educated and professionally trained workforce, but with a clear predominance of men.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

A mix of stability and precarity characterises the professional landscape for Ecuadorian journalists. Notably, only 74.7% are union members, highlighting a moderate level of collective organisation within the profession. Most journalists report feeling some stress at work, with a mean of 3.20 (SD = 1.13) on a 1–5 scale, suggesting that work-related pressure is a salient issue.

Regarding employment, the mean years of work experience as a journalist are 11.1 (SD = 8.9; Median = 9), reflecting a workforce with both early-career and highly experienced professionals. Only 17.2% report working in a specific beat or subject area, indicating a predominance of generalist roles. Journalists report working an average of 43.5 hours per week (SD = 12.9; Median = 43; for those in full-time employment). The significant range of standard deviation reveals a substantial variation in weekly workload. However, when asked about hours spent at home working, the average is lower (Mean = 9.6, SD = 12.6), suggesting some boundary between work and home life. A notable proportion of journalists also hold additional jobs outside journalism, illustrating the need for supplementary income and the prevalence of portfolio careers.

¹ Country sample does not fully align with WJS specifications regarding maximum margin of error (see WJS3 Methodology).

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Ecuadorian journalists report frequent exposure to various safety threats. 33.7% have sometimes, often, or very frequently faced demeaning or hateful speech, and 19.8% have experienced public discrediting. Surveillance (17.3%), hacking (15.1%), and intimidation (13.7%) are also notable. Rarely, more severe threats, such as arrest (7.7%), legal action (15.4%), or physical attacks (6.7%), occur. Work-related concerns are high: 55.5% fear job loss, 59.4% are concerned about their physical well-being, 70.6% about their emotional health, and 84.6% agree that those who harm journalists often go unpunished.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	299	2.0%	6.4%	23.7%	39.8%	28.1%
Public discrediting of your work	299	2.0%	5.4%	13.4%	28.8%	50.5%
Surveillance	299	1.0%	4.7%	13.7%	21.7%	58.9%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	299	1.0%	2.3%	11.7%	24.1%	60.9%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	299	0.3%	0.7%	1.3%	5.4%	92.3%
Legal actions against you because of your work	299	0.7%	1.0%	4.3%	10.0%	84.6%
Stalking	299	0.7%	1.7%	8.7%	20.1%	68.9%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	299	1.7%	1.7%	11.0%	25.4%	61.9%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	299	0.3%	1.7%	4.0%	9.7%	84.3%
Other physical attacks	299	0.7%	0.7%	3.3%	17.1%	78.3%
Coercion	299	1.0%	0.7%	4.7%	12.4%	81.9%
Questioning of your personal morality	299	2.7%	2.7%	12.7%	31.4%	53.2%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	299	0.7%	2.0%	4.3%	14.7%	78.3%
Others disseminating your personal information	299	0.3%	1.7%	9.0%	24.4%	64.5%
Workplace bullying	299	0.3%	2.3%	9.0%	18.1%	70.2%
Abductions	299	0.3%	0.7%	0.7%	2.7%	95.7%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	299	0.7%	1.0%	0.7%	5.7%	92.0%
Intimidation that targets family	299	0.7%	0%	2.3%	8.4%	88.6%

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	299	55.5%	3.42	1.29
Concerned about physical well-being	299	59.4%	3.51	1.30
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	299	70.6%	3.83	1.18
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Ecuador go unpunished	299	84.6%	4.25	0.89

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

Ecuadorian journalists assign high importance to roles such as "discussing future implications of current events" (92.6%), "educating the audience" (86%), "promoting peace and tolerance" (86.0%), and "counteracting disinformation" (83.3%). In contrast, roles such as "motivating political participation" or "supporting government policies" are considered less of a priority.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	299	79.9%	3.97	0.87
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	299	69.2%	3.79	0.98
Shine a light on society's problems	299	86.3%	4.30	0.80
Motivate people to participate in politics	299	40.8%	3.07	1.22
Provide analysis of current affairs	299	82.6%	4.10	0.81
Let people express their views	299	83.9%	4.16	0.78
Provide information people need to form political opinion	299	73.6%	3.92	1.00
Advocate for social change	299	83.6%	4.18	0.81
Influence public opinion	299	55.5%	3.52	1.05
Set the political agenda	299	41.8%	3.13	1.15
Promote peace and tolerance	299	86.0%	4.31	0.74
Educate the audience	299	87.0%	4.33	0.82
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	299	82.3%	4.14	0.84
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	299	85.3%	4.28	0.78
Support national development	299	86.3%	4.25	0.78
Support government policy	299	49.8%	3.47	1.05
Convey a positive image of political leaders	299	45.5%	3.24	1.20
Provide entertainment and relaxation	299	56.5%	3.53	1.07
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	299	76.6%	3.96	0.94
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	299	68.2%	3.82	0.91
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	299	79.9%	4.08	0.82
Support efforts to protect public health	299	76.9%	3.97	0.81
Counteract disinformation	299	83.3%	4.16	0.83
Discuss future implications of current events	299	92.6%	4.55	0.67

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

A large majority of Ecuadorian journalists believe interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts (65.6%), and 61.5% agree that things are either true or false. However, only 29.8% agree that truth is inevitably shaped by those in power, and 38.5% say it is impossible to withhold personal beliefs. Objectivity is valued, with 68.6% agreeing it is possible to represent reality in reporting. Most journalists endorse transparency (73.5%) and alert audiences when claims are untruthful (77.3%). Intuitive and community-oriented epistemologies are less prominent.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	299	65.6%	3.62	1.11
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	299	29.8%	2.77	1.16
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	299	38.5%	2.09	1.09
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	299	61.5%	3.52	1.21
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	299	68.6%	3.67	0.99
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	299	29.4%	2.77	1.12
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	299	25.1%	2.70	1.07
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	299	67.2%	3.67	0.94
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	299	46.5%	3.18	1.72
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	299	73.6%	3.82	1.01
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	299	77.3%	3.90	0.94

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

Most Ecuadorian journalists (86%) believe that professional standards should always guide their ethical decisions. However, 35.1% accept using confidential documents on occasion, and 49.2% justify the use of hidden recording devices in certain situations. Only a minority consistently justify controversial practices such as impersonation (2%) or using unverified information (3.3%).

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	299	86.0%	4.21	1.03
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	299	35.1%	2.87	1.23
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	299	25.1%	2.48	1.23
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	299	35.1%	2.76	1.34

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	299	2.0%	15.4%
Using hidden recording devices	299	4.0%	49.2%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	299	5.4%	35.1%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	299	4.3%	35.5%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	299	3.7%	21.4%
Paying people for confidential information	299	2.7%	30.8%
Accepting money from sources	299	1.7%	4.7%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	299	3.0%	30.1%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	299	2.3%	21.7%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	299	3.3%	6.0%

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

Most Ecuadorian journalists report high editorial autonomy: 64.2% experience “a great deal” or “complete” freedom in selecting stories, and 61.5% in deciding which aspects to emphasize. In contrast, only 20.9% perceive a similar level of overall media freedom in the country, highlighting a gap between individual autonomy and the perceived broader media environment.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	299	64.2%	3.82	1.00
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	299	61.5%	3.74	0.98
Media freedom in Ecuador	292	21.2%	2.87	0.94

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

The strongest internal influences come from journalistic ethics (77.1%), editorial supervisors (58.1%), and news-gathering resources (57.6%). Among external factors, media laws/regulations (41.7%) and audience feedback (54.6%) stand out. Influences from groups such as organized crime (22.9%) and terrorist groups (18.5%) are low but not absent.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	276	39.1%	3.08	1.13
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	282	58.2%	3.43	1.13
The business managers of the news organization	282	44.7%	3.20	1.22
The owners of the news organization	281	52.7%	3.31	1.29
Editorial policy	278	52.5%	3.36	1.16
Advertising considerations	282	35.1%	3.88	1.25
Profit expectations	282	38.7%	2.94	1.28
Audience research and data	284	54.2%	3.36	1.15
Availability of news-gathering resources	287	56.8%	3.49	1.15
Time limits	286	46.9%	3.24	1.15
Journalism ethics	290	77.2%	4.00	1.09
Self-censorship	276	31.5%	2.83	1.20
Personal values and beliefs	287	52.3%	3.32	1.33
Colleagues in other media	288	19.4%	2.44	1.13
Friends, acquaintances and family	284	19.4%	2.43	1.10
Feedback from the audience	291	54.6%	3.48	1.06
Competing news organizations	279	25.8%	2.71	1.12
Media laws and regulation	283	41.7%	3.12	1.16
Access to information	290	61.4%	3.63	1.14
Government censorship	279	36.2%	2.85	1.32
Government officials	278	28.4%	2.61	1.29
Politicians	279	22.9%	2.54	1.24
Business people	280	21.4%	2.44	1.21
Public relations	285	34.4%	2.81	1.21
Relationships with news sources	282	40.4%	3.12	1.16
Police	280	24.3%	2.53	1.21
Issue advocacy groups	273	17.9%	2.33	1.15
Religious groups and institutions	276	14.1%	2.20	1.11
Military	274	17.5%	2.28	1.16
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	266	15.0%	2.13	1.14
Organized crime and criminal groups	266	22.9%	2.35	1.29
Terrorist groups	270	18.5%	2.15	1.27

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.)