

Egypt

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INTRODUCTION

The journalistic tradition in Egypt is both rich and complex, formed by a long-lasting interplay of intellectual activism, resistance and state control. Historically, Egypt served as a leading hub for journalism, media and the publishing industry in the Arab world. Egyptian journalists and news media have significantly influenced Arab media landscapes, with Cairo regarded as a central media capital for decades until the late 20th century. In the past decade, however, Egypt has transitioned into a tightly controlled authoritarian state, where political pluralism and press freedom have been severely restricted. Despite IMF economic reforms and support, Egypt has experienced persistent economic decline, including high inflation and repeated currency devaluations. As in many other contexts, press freedom in Egypt is closely intertwined with broader political and economic structures and legal frameworks; it not only reflects the nature of political and economic structures but also functions as a tool to sustain them.

Most media outlets in Egypt, whether they are state or privately owned, largely operate as instruments of regime legitimacy. Legacy party press had lost its relevance in the past years. Current media play a key role in suppressing dissent, influencing public sphere, and downgrading alternative narratives. Throughout the last decade, Freedom House and Reporters without Borders classified Egypt as “not free”. Despite this outlook, there are persistent small pockets of marginalized independent media amid a hybrid media landscape. This study draws on data collected from a representative sample of journalists working across various media platforms. A combination of face-to-face interviews, online surveys, and telephone calls was employed to reach respondents during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic posed logistical challenges, often delaying data collection and requiring multiple contacts to complete individual questionnaires.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The Egyptian sample of journalists is, to some extent, gender-balanced (65.5% men) with an average age of 40.6 years. Most are well educated: 77% hold a bachelor's, 9.4% a master's degree, and 8.4% a doctorate. Additionally, 85% have formal journalism education or training, mainly through university (74.3%).

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

Slightly more than half of Egyptian journalists worked for an organization focused on newspaper publishing. Less than 20% for a TV organization, 11.2% for native online media, and 8.3% for a radio outlet; few worked for magazine companies. Around 37.1% served in transnational media, while 23.7% focused on local/regional outlets. Journalists had, on average, 16.8 years of experience, with most (53%) covering multiple beats. A large majority are members of professional associations. Most held full-time permanent contracts, but half of journalists also had other jobs, reflecting job insecurity. Egyptian full-time journalists, on average, report working 39.9 hours per week.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

The data in the table 1 below show that Egyptian journalists face more psychological and digital threats than physical or financial ones. The most common problems are surveillance, followed directly by demeaning or hateful speech, public discrediting of work, workplace bullying, hacking or blocking of accounts, questioning of personal morality, intimidations and coercion. Although less common, imprisonment, assault, and legal action are still serious threats to press freedom.

Table 2 highlights significant work-related concerns among journalists. Over half of journalists express worry about losing their job within the next year, reflecting widespread job insecurity. Emotional and mental well-being is also a major concern, alongside fears of impunity for those who harm journalists. While concerns about physical well-being are somewhat lower, they remain notable.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	421	5.2%	3.8%	19.2%	19.0%	52.7%
Public discrediting of your work	427	5.2%	7.0%	16.9%	13.8%	57.1%
Surveillance	418	6.5%	8.4%	23.7%	16.7%	44.7%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	418	4.1%	4.3%	13.4%	12.0%	66.3%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	404	1.2%	2.0%	3.5%	4.2%	89.1%
Legal actions against you because of your work	413	1.9%	1.7%	7.0%	7.3%	82.1%
Stalking	407	3.2%	1.7%	5.2%	5.2%	84.8%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	412	2.7%	1.9%	8.5%	10.9%	76.0%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	413	3.6%	1.5%	2.4%	5.6%	86.9%
Other physical attacks	411	2.4%	0.5%	3.9%	6.8%	86.4%
Coercion	411	2.7%	4.1%	6.3%	8.3%	78.6%
Questioning of your personal morality	416	3.8%	2.2%	8.4%	12.5%	73.1%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	411	3.6%	2.2%	4.1%	9.2%	80.8%
Others disseminating your personal information	415	4.1%	3.1%	6.3%	10.1%	76.4%
Workplace bullying	418	3.6%	3.8%	10.8%	12.9%	68.9%

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	396	53.5%	3.40	1.37
Concerned about physical well-being	409	30.3%	2.74	1.30
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	404	46.8%	3.18	1.36
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Egypt go unpunished	395	45.6%	3.16	1.36

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

Table 3 shows that journalists overwhelmingly value traditional normative roles, with being a detached observer and counteracting disinformation ranked highest in importance. Roles focused on education, public service, and problem solving, such as shining a light on society's problems, promoting peace, and supporting public health, also received high importance ratings. In contrast, roles tied to alignment with power, such as supporting government, policy and conveying a positive image of political leaders were rated as less important.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	432	97.5%	4.75	0.55
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	403	71.0%	3.91	1.14
Shine a light on society's problems	422	89.1%	4.44	0.85
Motivate people to participate in politics	411	61.6%	3.71	1.13
Provide analysis of current affairs	414	82.1%	4.24	1.04
Let people express their views	419	73.0%	3.96	1.10
Provide information people need to form political opinion	421	77.9%	4.13	1.12
Advocate for social change	412	69.2%	3.85	1.09
Influence public opinion	413	78.7%	4.13	1.06
Set the political agenda	394	56.4%	3.48	1.22
Promote peace and tolerance	423	85.1%	4.40	0.94
Educate the audience	426	87.8%	4.49	0.87
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	426	81.9%	4.25	0.94
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	409	77.5%	4.18	1.04
Support national development	418	84.5%	4.37	0.89
Support government policy	382	50.8%	3.37	1.42
Convey a positive image of political leaders	388	38.7%	3.07	1.40
Provide entertainment and relaxation	415	62.9%	3.68	1.16
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	414	68.6%	3.84	1.15
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	413	65.9%	3.77	1.12
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	407	41.0%	3.09	1.32
Support efforts to protect public health	418	83.7%	4.23	0.95
Counteract disinformation	423	93.9%	4.67	0.69
Discuss future implications of current events	423	80.4%	4.12	1.00

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

Table 4 indicates that respondents largely endorse a pragmatic view of journalism, recognizing both the need for interpretation and the possibility of objective reporting. While most journalists agree that facts require interpretation and that objectivity is achievable, fewer support more relativistic views, such as truth being shaped by power, or the inevitability of personal bias.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	412	75.2%	4.03	0.96
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	387	36.7%	3.14	1.19
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	402	44.3%	3.26	1.15
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	413	34.4%	3.12	1.17
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	403	76.2%	4.01	0.91

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

Table 5 reveals strong support for adherence to professional standards in ethical decision-making. The overwhelming majority agree that these standards should guide journalists regardless of context. A majority also recognize the need for flexibility in extraordinary circumstances. While nearly half support a situational approach, significantly fewer endorse relying on personal judgment alone.

Table 6 shows that journalists basically view controversial reporting methods as ethically challenging, with very low support for these practices being "always justified." However, a notable minority consider some methods acceptable "on occasion," particularly using hidden recording devices and paying for confidential information. Justifications drop significantly for more ethically sensitive actions, such as using personal materials without permission.

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	428	81.5%	4.35	0.94
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	415	56.4%	3.49	1.19
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	416	47.4%	3.20	1.28
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	409	28.6%	2.63	1.39

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	421	3.8%	36.1%
Using hidden recording devices	421	4.0%	48.5%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	405	2.5%	29.9%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	408	5.4%	17.2%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	416	2.2%	13.0%
Paying people for confidential information	414	8.7%	39.6%
Accepting money from sources	420	4.3%	4.8%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	416	6.7%	20.9%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	408	13.2%	32.6%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	415	2.9%	8.2%

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

Table 7 indicates a minority of journalists see press freedom as low, however, higher percentage of them feel they have considerable freedom in choosing and shaping news stories as well as deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized. A considerable gap exists between individual editorial autonomy and the wider structural and political constraints.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	415	42.9%	3.19	1.22
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	409	43.5%	3.17	1.20
Media freedom in Egypt	395	27.1%	2.62	1.23

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Table 8 reveals a complex structure of editorial influences. Internal factors such as editorial policy, journalism ethics and self-censorship are perceived as highly influential, along with structural constraints like access to information and government censorship. Supervisors, owners, and time/resource pressures also exert strong influence. Surprisingly, external actors like politicians, businesspeople, and advocacy groups are seen as less influential.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	368	43.5%	3.42	1.18
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	409	66.0%	3.90	1.03
The business managers of the news organization	379	55.7%	3.50	1.28
The owners of the news organization	366	65.03%	3.77	1.26
Editorial policy	406	79.3%	4.21	0.99
Advertising considerations	338	46.2%	3.30	1.36
Profit expectations	337	46.9%	3.33	1.34
Audience research and data	348	52.9%	3.48	1.29
Availability of news-gathering resources	376	67.3%	3.86	1.16
Time limits	384	66.2%	3.80	1.08
Journalism ethics	389	71.7%	4.01	1.08
Self-censorship	393	77.9%	4.17	1.06
Personal values and beliefs	390	75.1%	4.05	1.17
Colleagues in other media	354	37.9%	3.19	1.34
Friends, acquaintances and family	332	24.4%	2.70	1.24
Feedback from the audience	359	46.8%	3.38	1.22
Competing news organizations	374	62.0%	3.77	1.12
Media laws and regulation	377	69.2%	3.93	1.08
Access to information	381	78.5%	4.13	0.99
Government censorship	375	73.3%	4.09	1.08
Government officials	347	53.9%	3.49	1.37
Politicians	340	45.0%	3.27	1.31
Business people	323	35.9%	3.00	1.32
Public relations	334	44.9%	3.32	1.29
Relationships with news sources	360	64.7%	3.73	1.16
Police	319	48.6%	3.42	1.30
Issue advocacy groups	303	33.0%	2.93	1.31
Scientists or health experts	44	40.9%	3.20	1.42

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.)