

# Ethiopia

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## INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is Africa's second most populated country with over 120 million people, who belong to over 80 different ethnic groups. Prior to 1974, Ethiopia was governed by a monarchy, until Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown by a communist military committee known as the "Derg." In 1991, after a long-running civil war the Derg was defeated and Ethiopia has since followed a controversial system of "ethnic federalism," where each ethnic group has retained a degree of autonomy from the federal government. Despite strong economic growth in recent decades and declining poverty levels, Ethiopia's per capita gross national income is \$1,020 (2023/24).

With limited financial support for journalism from advertisers and audience subscriptions, the state has played a central role in journalism in Ethiopia. The majority of journalists work for state-owned news organizations. With a change in government leadership in 2018, journalists were released from prison and Ethiopia's journalistic freedom seemed to be expanding. This changed towards the beginning of our data collection period, with arrests and detention of journalists increasing in 2022. War between the federal government and Tigray in late 2020, as well as numerous ongoing conflicts in Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Oromia, and other areas have produced vastly different experiences for Ethiopians and for Ethiopian journalists.

## BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The average age of Ethiopian journalists in our sample was 37 years (SD = 7.9, Median = 36). The vast majority of Ethiopian journalists have a college degree, with 92.4% holding a college degree, and 39.5% holding a master's degree or above. Additionally, 85.8% of Ethiopian journalists have completed formal journalism training, with 68.2% studying journalism in university or college, 16.4% reported receiving training via apprenticeships or cadetships, and 27.2% had completed short-term journalism trainings. Among Ethiopian journalists who took part in the survey, only 25.1% were female. This is likely lower than the actual population of female journalists, as our pre-study census of news organizations reported 37.9% of journalists were female.

## JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In terms of the background of their main employers, the majority of journalists surveyed worked in either television (40.1%) or radio (36.4%). About 10% of Ethiopian journalists reported working for native online media and 7.7% for print newspapers. Very few journalists worked for magazines (0.9%) and only 1.7% of the interviewed journalists claimed not to have a main employer. Most journalists (67.5%) worked for national (or trans-national) media, while 31.0% worked for local or regional media.

On average, Ethiopian journalists had 8.8 years of professional experience (SD = 5.8; Median = 7). A majority of journalists (73.2%) worked on a variety of beats or subject areas rather than on a single one. In terms of belonging to a union or a professional association, 39.0% reported having a membership.

Of the Ethiopian journalists who were interviewed, 91.9% had a full-time contract; with 73.6% reported having a full-time permanent contract. Only 9.8% worked as freelancers or were self-employed. A substantial percentage (40.4%) of journalists reported getting some income from outside of journalism. Only 8.1% reported having a part-time permanent contract, with 5.6% reporting a part-time permanent contract and only 1.7% having a part-time, temporary contract.

The average number of hours worked each week by Ethiopian full-time journalists was reported at 48.5 hours (SD = 14.6; Median = 48). When asked about the stress of being a journalist, 55.2% reported feeling stressed out at work often or very often during the previous six months, where only 18.1% never or rarely felt stressed at work.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Demeaning or hateful speech was the most common threat experienced by Ethiopian journalists (see Table 1). The next most common threats were surveillance and the discrediting of their work. Arrests, detention, legal threats, and stalking are not particularly uncommon, with nearly 25% reporting experiencing these threats at least sometimes. Similarly, experiencing physical assault was reported, at least to some degree, by over 20% of journalists in Ethiopia, and more than 15% report experiencing sexual assault at least sometimes. Nearly half were concerned about their emotional well-being, and 37.6% were concerned about their physical wellbeing (see Table 2). Nearly 70% of Ethiopian journalists strongly agree that they are “concerned that those who harm journalists in Ethiopia go unpunished.”

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	356	12.4%	9.3%	29.8%	22.8%	25.8%
Surveillance	348	9.2%	12.9%	23.9%	21.6%	32.5%
Public discrediting of your work	353	6.5%	13.0%	26.9%	21.0%	32.6%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	355	5.6%	9.3%	23.7%	10.7%	50.7%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	355	5.6%	7.3%	22.3%	21.7%	43.1%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	356	4.5%	7.0%	15.2%	5.3%	68.0%
Legal actions against you because of your work	353	4.0%	4.8%	15.3%	11.0%	64.9%
Stalking	351	3.4%	6.6%	17.7%	18.8%	53.6%
Other physical attacks	351	3.1%	4.8%	12.5%	7.1%	72.4%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	350	2.9%	4.0%	8.3%	5.1%	79.7%

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
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Ethiopia go unpunished	358	69.0%	3.87	1.19
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	358	47.5%	3.12	1.30
Concerned about physical well-being	359	37.6%	2.91	1.24
Worried about losing job in journalism within the next 12 months	359	25.3%	2.64	1.26

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

Ethiopian journalists found interventionist roles very or extremely important, while more detached journalistic roles were relevant but less appreciated (see Table 3). Promoting peace, solutions to society’s problems, and educating the audience were the top three most important roles fitting with the “development journalism” and “solutions” journalism ideals. The political roles of journalists were among the least valued, with five of the lowest six roles being related to the role of journalism in politics; this included low scores for both the oppositional journalistic role of monitoring those in power and an even lower score for conveying a positive image of the political leaders.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Promote peace and tolerance	360	93.1%	4.62	0.69
Point toward possible solutions to society’s problems	361	88.6%	4.46	0.76
Educate the audience	359	87.2%	4.43	0.76
Let people express their views	357	86.0%	4.32	0.84
Shine a light on society’s problems	355	85.9%	4.34	0.91
Support national development	358	85.2%	4.34	0.92
Advocate for social change	353	83.3%	4.27	0.89
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	357	82.4%	4.27	0.89
Provide analysis of current affairs	357	81.5%	4.17	0.92
Counteract disinformation	355	80.6%	4.15	1.09
Support efforts to protect public health	356	78.4%	4.10	1.00
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	359	73.8%	4.01	1.00
Influence public opinion	354	64.1%	3.76	1.14
Be a detached observer	359	62.4%	3.62	1.29
Provide information people need to form political opinion	359	57.9%	3.53	1.23
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	352	57.7%	3.62	1.04
Provide entertainment and relaxation	357	57.7%	3.61	1.05
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	352	57.7%	3.46	1.18
Support government policy	356	43.5%	3.25	1.17
Motivate people to participate in politics	351	40.5%	3.11	1.25
Set the political agenda	358	43.0%	3.15	1.28
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	355	38.6%	3.09	1.22
Convey a positive image of political leaders	359	27.3%	2.70	1.24

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 disagreement among Ethiopian journalists about the nature of truth and objectivity in reporting (see Table 4). While the highest agreement among journalists was regarding the need for interpreting facts which is more aligned with the subjective view of journalism the second highest agreement was that objective reporting was possible.

**TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES**

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	359	85.50%	4.19	0.80
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	355	67.30%	3.70	0.99
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	357	51.00%	3.33	1.20
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	358	41.30%	3.13	1.18
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	357	37.30%	3.04	1.13

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 Ethiopia strongly agreed that what is ethical should be decided by professional standards rather than personal judgment (see Table 5). When it comes to controversial reporting methods, using some deception hidden recording devices and claiming to be someone else were at least justified on occasion by over half of journalists (see Table 6). The two least acceptable practices were publishing unverified information (20.2% found it justified on occasion or always) and accepting money from a source (14.2% said it was justified on occasion or always).

**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	362	73.8%	4.02	1.07
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	358	59.5%	3.63	1.09
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	359	47.4%	3.23	1.15
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	358	17.3%	2.37	1.14

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
Using hidden recording devices	360	5.0%	61.9%
Claiming to be somebody else	360	7.5%	51.7%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	362	8.3%	40.6%
Paying people for confidential information	360	10.0%	33.3%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	362	4.4%	35.6%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	363	6.3%	29.8%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	363	6.1%	28.4%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	361	5.0%	25.2%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	362	3.9%	15.7%
Accepting money from sources	359	3.6%	10.6%

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

A little less than a third of Ethiopian journalists reported having a great deal/complete freedom to select news stories and to decide which aspects to focus on (see Table 7). But only one in ten journalists agreed that journalism in Ethiopia had a great deal/complete freedom.

**TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM**

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	359	26.5%	2.96	1.03
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	359	30.4%	3.04	1.02
Media freedom in Ethiopia	357	10.1%	2.29	1.00

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

## EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Ethiopian journalists found external factors to be most influential – with top three influential sources being access to information, government censorship, and government officials. The internal factors that were most influential were their news organization's editorial policy, followed by the influence of owners and editorial supervisors (see Table 8).

**TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES**

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Access to information	348	77.0%	3.99	0.91
Government censorship	349	69.1%	3.82	1.15
Government officials	345	67.8%	3.86	1.17
Editorial policy	348	67.5%	3.82	1.18
Media laws and regulation	354	65.5%	3.75	1.18
The owners of the news organization	327	61.8%	3.56	1.26
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	349	59.3%	3.53	1.19
Journalism ethics	335	58.2%	3.47	1.26
Politicians	336	58.0%	3.56	1.26
Time limits	340	52.4%	3.38	1.15
Self-censorship	341	49.6%	3.36	1.21
Availability of news-gathering resources	329	45.9%	3.21	1.20
The business managers of the news organization	325	44.6%	3.07	1.31
Personal values and beliefs	334	44.6%	3.07	1.34
Relationships with news sources	339	41.9%	3.09	1.22
Feedback from the audience	342	40.4%	3.15	1.12
Competing news organizations	343	39.9%	3.10	1.19
Military	294	39.7%	2.77	1.45
Public relations	331	34.4%	2.87	1.25
Audience research and data	296	33.1%	2.87	1.29
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	270	33.0%	2.46	1.50
Profit expectations	288	29.9%	2.73	1.21
Police	314	28.7%	2.64	1.38
Organized crime and criminal groups	241	28.5%	2.29	1.50
Business people	326	27.0%	2.63	1.30
Religious groups and institutions	295	25.2%	2.91	1.48
Terrorist groups	296	24.9%	2.35	1.33
Advertising considerations	292	24.0%	2.58	1.17
Scientists or health experts	325	22.6%	2.58	1.29
Peers on the news staff	338	22.5%	2.67	1.13
Friends, acquaintances and family	338	21.3%	2.40	1.19
Colleagues in other media	337	20.2%	2.37	1.20
Issue advocacy groups	316	18.7%	2.36	1.18

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.)