

# Indonesia

NURHAYA MUCHTAR & MASDUKI

## INTRODUCTION

As of 2025, Indonesian journalists continued to face pressure from the government. The newly elected President Prabowo, who assumed power in October 2024, introduced a form of liberal authoritarianism. The former general has expanded the role of the military in the government, not only for national defense but also for serving key roles in socio-political development – a similar role that they played during the New Order Government.

Current journalistic landscape in Indonesia has primarily been influenced by COVID19 and sociopolitical situation. Media ownership, particularly in mainstream media outlets, has been controlled by media conglomerates. The pandemic caused economic crisis heavily affected the mainstream media, resulting in the closure of numerous media outlets. The 2025 data from the Indonesian Press Council indicates that at least 1,200 journalists lost their jobs. At the same time, the pandemic also motivated the emergence of numerous digital news outlets due to easy access for people to news and information through social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. The critical role of social media has motivated governments to use it as a tool for propaganda. The new government also could easily threaten or bully journalists who conducted investigative reporting as well as publishing news stories that appear to be critical to the government. The new government placed journalists as enemies. The government also favors disinformation through social media as a tool for propaganda.

The fieldwork for this study took place in 2023, approximately four months before the Presidential election. At the time of data collection, political campaigns were conducted in different areas in Indonesia influenced the nature of journalists' works and their perception toward their works.

## BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

On a sample of Indonesian journalists in terms of gender, 65.7% are male, and 34.3% are females. On average, they are 34.6 years old ( $SD = 8.0$ ). They are generally well-educated; 78.8% of them held a bachelor's degree or equivalent, and 6.7% had a master's degree or equivalent. Moreover, 30.5% of the respondents have acquired formal education or professional training in journalism. This education or training is usually obtained at university or in college (98.5%) but also via apprenticeships or cadetships (2.6%).

## JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In terms of the background of their main employers, more than half of journalists in Indonesia (58.4%) worked for native online media, 16.4% for newspapers, 4.9% for radio outlets, and 11.5% for television news agencies, respectively. Very few journalists worked for magazines (0.8%) and telecommunications (0.6%, respectively).

On average, Indonesian journalists had 8.2 years of professional experience ( $SD = 5.5$ ; Median = 7). A majority of them (85.1%) worked on a variety of beats or subject areas rather than on a single one. More than two-thirds of Indonesian journalists (77.6%) were members of professional associations.

About one-third of the interviewed journalists in Indonesia had a full-time contract (38.8% permanently and 3.9% temporarily employed). About 21.0% worked as freelancers or were self-employed, and an additional 0.8% had other forms of employment. Finally, 3.9% had a part-time permanent contract, and 8.5% had a part-time temporary contract. These results suggest a precarious employment situation, as evidenced by the fact that 53.4% of respondents reported having additional jobs outside journalism.

The average working week of Indonesian full-time journalists was 44.8 hours ( $SD = 20.8$ ; Median = 48). Relatedly, 36.0% of the respondents reported they felt stressed out at work often or very often during the previous six months; only 28.3% had never or rarely felt that way.

## SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Threats or intimidation directed at journalists, demeaning or hateful speech, and public discrediting of journalists' work fared among the most common safety threats experienced by Indonesian journalists (see Table 1). However, despite experienced less frequently, experiences of more dangerous threats, such as stalking hacking or blocking social media accounts are worrying. These experiences also impact the concerns expressed by Indonesian journalists; although less than one-third of journalists were concerned about losing their job, a broad majority were concerned that those who harm journalists in Indonesia go unpunished, while almost half of the journalists were concerned about their physical or emotional well-being (see Table 2). Moreover, nearly 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                    | 720 | 3.6%       | 9.6%  | 23.9%     | 16.0%  | 46.9% |
| Public discrediting of your work                               | 720 | 3.6%       | 8.9%  | 28.1%     | 19.4%  | 40.0% |
| Surveillance   | 720 | 1.5%       | 2.6%  | 7.1%      | 6.1%   | 82.6% |
| Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites       | 720 | 2.8%       | 5.1%  | 11.8%     | 7.9%   | 72.4% |
| Arrests, detentions or imprisonment                            | 720 | 0.6%       | 1.0%  | 2.6%      | 2.1%   | 93.8% |
| Legal actions against you because of your work                 | 720 | 0.6%       | 1.4%  | 3.3%      | 1.9%   | 92.8% |
| Stalking   | 720 | 3.5%       | 7.5%  | 16.5%     | 12.8%  | 59.7% |
| Other threats or intimidations directed at you                 | 720 | 6.1%       | 12.1% | 22.2%     | 15.1%  | 44.4% |
| Sexual assault or sexual harassment                            | 720 | 0.7%       | 2.8%  | 6.1%      | 5.8%   | 84.6% |
| Other physical attacks   | 720 | 1.5%       | 3.2%  | 16.7%     | 11.5%  | 67.1% |
| Coercion   | 720 | 1.3%       | 2.5%  | 8.3%      | 10.0%  | 77.9% |
| Questioning of your personal morality                          | 720 | 3.1%       | 6.3%  | 16.1%     | 14.9%  | 59.7% |
| Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories | 720 | 1.5%       | 3.9%  | 11.5%     | 10.4%  | 72.6% |
| Others disseminating your personal information                 | 720 | 2.8%       | 4.6%  | 13.3%     | 15.0%  | 64.3% |
| Workplace bullying   | 720 | 1.0%       | 4.2%  | 8.9%      | 11.1%  | 74.9% |
| Abductions   | 720 | 0.3%       | 0.8%  | 1.9%      | 1.8%   | 95.1% |
| Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment                | 720 | 0.3%       | 1.1%  | 5.7%      | 6.1%   | 86.8% |
| Intimidation that targets family                               | 720 | 0.4%       | 2.2%  | 4.6%      | 6.8%   | 86.0% |

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/<br>strongly agree | Mean | SD   |
|--|-----|--------------------------|------|------|
| Worried about losing the job in journalism within the next 12 months | 720 | 29.3%                    | 2.77 | 1.44 |
| Concerned about physical well-being                                  | 720 | 45.1%                    | 3.34 | 1.32 |
| Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing                       | 720 | 40.6%                    | 3.13 | 1.40 |
| Concerned that those who harm journalists in Indonesia go unpunished | 720 | 73.6%                    | 4.11 | 1.19 |

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

In regard to professional roles, Indonesian journalists found that educating the audience, promoting peace and information as well as counteracting disinformation, as the most important roles in their profession. Interviewed journalists also found that it is very important for them to shine a light on society's problems and let people express their views. Nevertheless, only 22.8 percent found that it is acceptable to convey a positive image of political leaders and set political agenda. The time when data collection was conducted might be the main reason for how they perceived these roles.

**TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES**

|   | N   | Very/extremely<br>important | Mean | SD   |
|---|-----|-----------------------------|------|------|
| Be a detached observer                                      | 720 | 47.1%                       | 3.46 | 1.21 |
| Monitor and scrutinize those in power                       | 720 | 64.0%                       | 3.84 | 1.13 |
| Shine a light on society's problems                         | 720 | 89.2%                       | 4.53 | 0.82 |
| Motivate people to participate in politics                  | 720 | 48.6%                       | 3.46 | 1.22 |
| Provide analysis of current affairs                         | 720 | 81.5%                       | 4.29 | 0.89 |
| Let people express their views                              | 720 | 86.0%                       | 4.40 | 0.85 |
| Provide information people need to form a political opinion | 720 | 80.7%                       | 4.26 | 0.94 |
| Advocate for social change                                  | 720 | 76.4%                       | 4.17 | 0.91 |
| Influence public opinion                                    | 720 | 52.8%                       | 3.57 | 1.18 |
| Set the political agenda                                    | 720 | 33.8%                       | 3.06 | 1.23 |
| Promote peace and tolerance                                 | 720 | 90.8%                       | 4.64 | 0.79 |
| Educate the audience  | 720 | 90.0%                       | 4.61 | 0.76 |
| Point toward possible solutions to society's problems       | 720 | 84.0%                       | 4.42 | 0.86 |
| Speak on behalf of the marginalized                         | 720 | 81.8%                       | 4.39 | 0.94 |
| Support national development                                | 720 | 71.8%                       | 4.13 | 0.99 |
| Support government policy                                   | 720 | 39.0%                       | 3.45 | 1.00 |
| Convey a positive image of political leaders                | 720 | 22.8%                       | 2.91 | 1.15 |
| Provide entertainment and relaxation                        | 720 | 49.2%                       | 3.56 | 1.01 |
| Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience | 720 | 68.5%                       | 4.02 | 0.93 |
| Provide advice, orientation, and direction for daily life   | 720 | 50.3%                       | 3.55 | 1.08 |
| Tell stories that emotionally move the audience             | 720 | 77.7%                       | 4.17 | 0.84 |
| Support efforts to protect public health                    | 720 | 85.6%                       | 4.42 | 0.82 |
| Counteract disinformation                                   | 720 | 89.9%                       | 4.58 | 0.82 |
| Discuss future implications of current events               | 720 | 73.5%                       | 4.06 | 0.90 |

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 Indonesian journalists regarding their perceptions of journalistic epistemology (see Table 4). Respondents agreed on the importance of representing objective reality in reporting, intuitively knowing what the final story will be, and interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts.

**TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES**

|   | N   | Agree/<br>strongly agree | Mean | SD   |
|---|-----|--------------------------|------|------|
| Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts                              | 720 | 69.7%                    | 3.98 | 1.02 |
| Those in power inevitably shape the truth                                       | 720 | 22.5%                    | 2.38 | 1.36 |
| Journalists can't withhold their personal beliefs from reporting                | 720 | 21.5%                    | 2.52 | 1.27 |
| Things are either true or false; there is no in-between                         | 720 | 29.7%                    | 2.92 | 1.30 |
| It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting                      | 720 | 75.8%                    | 4.18 | 1.02 |
| Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not | 720 | 36.5%                    | 3.07 | 1.28 |
| Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be                | 720 | 73.5%                    | 4.05 | 1.05 |
| Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves                           | 720 | 63.6%                    | 3.78 | 1.21 |
| Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately              | 720 | 38.6%                    | 3.23 | 1.26 |
| Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work              | 720 | 33.2%                    | 2.92 | 1.39 |
| Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful          | 720 | 45.4%                    | 3.41 | 1.20 |

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 Indonesia 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, however, using hidden records and paying people for information was most strongly rejected (see Table 6). Most journalists found it acceptable to use hidden recording devices and paying people for confidential information.

**TABLE 5. ETHICAL ORIENTATIONS**

|   | N   | Agree/<br>strongly agree | Mean | SD   |
|---|-----|--------------------------|------|------|
| What is ethical for journalists should always be determined by professional standards regardless of the situation and personal judgment     | 720 | 73.8%                    | 4.69 | 0.73 |
| What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them | 720 | 48.5%                    | 3.29 | 1.45 |
| What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation  | 720 | 0.0%                     |      |      |
| What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment   | 720 | 17.1%                    | 2.14 | 1.30 |

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   | 720 | 6.0%             | 23.5%                 |
| Using hidden recording devices   | 720 | 16.3%            | 53.3%                 |
| Using confidential business or government documents without authorization                                  | 720 | 7.2%             | 34.4%                 |
| Using the personal materials of influential people, such as documents and photos, without their permission | 720 | 3.8%             | 19.3%                 |
| Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission    | 720 | 7.6%             | 25.1%                 |
| Paying people for confidential information   | 720 | 9.2%             | 42.6%                 |
| Accepting money from sources   | 720 | 2.4%             | 18.1%                 |
| Accepting a free product or service from sources   | 720 | 3.3%             | 23.5%                 |
| Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature                                | 720 | 7.6%             | 51.3%                 |
| Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified                               | 720 | 2.1%             | 7.8%                  |

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

Indonesian 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 FREEDOM**

|   | N   | A great deal/<br>complete freedom | Mean | SD   |
|---|-----|-----------------------------------|------|------|
| Freedom in selecting the news stories                             | 720 | 61.0%                             | 3.72 | 1.00 |
| Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized | 720 | 62.5%                             | 3.78 | 0.98 |
| Media freedom in Indonesia  | 720 | 30.4%                             | 3.14 | 0.93 |

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

## EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Indonesian 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 and media laws and regulations to be extremely or very influential.

**TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES**

|  | N   | Very/extremely influential | Mean | SD   |
|--|-----|----------------------------|------|------|
| Peers on the news staff                        | 720 | 41.9%                      | 3.17 | 1.28 |
| Editorial supervisors and higher editors       | 720 | 65.0%                      | 3.80 | 1.18 |
| The business managers of the news organization | 720 | 52.5%                      | 3.53 | 1.25 |
| The owners of the news organization            | 720 | 52.4%                      | 3.49 | 1.32 |
| Editorial policy                               | 720 | 67.5%                      | 3.93 | 1.14 |
| Advertising considerations                     | 720 | 44.2%                      | 3.23 | 1.36 |
| Profit expectations                            | 720 | 40.1%                      | 3.13 | 1.33 |
| Audience research and data                     | 720 | 47.2%                      | 3.37 | 1.25 |
| Availability of news-gathering resources       | 720 | 62.1%                      | 3.80 | 1.12 |
| Time limits                                    | 720 | 55.6%                      | 3.61 | 1.13 |
| Journalism ethics                              | 720 | 76.5%                      | 4.20 | 1.09 |
| Self-censorship                                | 720 | 50.3%                      | 3.53 | 1.20 |
| Personal values and beliefs                    | 720 | 53.9%                      | 3.59 | 1.18 |
| Colleagues in other media                      | 720 | 33.9%                      | 3.01 | 1.21 |
| Friends, acquaintances, and family             | 720 | 36.7%                      | 3.13 | 1.21 |
| Feedback from the audience                     | 720 | 50.7%                      | 3.52 | 1.11 |
| Competing news organizations                   | 720 | 45.1%                      | 3.31 | 1.23 |
| Media laws and regulation                      | 720 | 69.0%                      | 4.00 | 1.07 |
| Access to information                          | 720 | 71.9%                      | 4.05 | 1.00 |
| Government censorship                          | 720 | 36.4%                      | 3.11 | 1.28 |
| Government officials                           | 720 | 28.6%                      | 2.87 | 1.25 |
| Politicians                                    | 720 | 23.9%                      | 2.67 | 1.26 |
| Business people                                | 720 | 23.9%                      | 2.68 | 1.23 |
| Public relations                               | 720 | 25.3%                      | 2.73 | 1.23 |
| Relationships with news sources                | 720 | 42.9%                      | 3.31 | 1.22 |
| Police   | 720 | 27.2%                      | 2.78 | 1.24 |
| Issue advocacy groups                          | 720 | 20.4%                      | 2.56 | 1.22 |
| Religious groups and institutions              | 720 | 29.4%                      | 2.94 | 1.17 |
| Military                                       | 720 | 20.8%                      | 2.58 | 1.24 |
| Scientists or health experts                   | 720 | 0.0%                       | 3.11 | 1.23 |

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.)