

Israel

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INTRODUCTION

As of 2025, Israel continues to face profound political, social, and security challenges, which were further exacerbated by the Hamas-led attack of October 7, 2023, and the ensuing war in Gaza. These events unfolded amid deepening internal polarization and mounting strain on democratic institutions. The economy remains technologically advanced, but is increasingly burdened by the costs of prolonged conflict, political instability, and persistent social inequalities.

Israel's journalistic tradition is rooted in a diverse and hybrid media system, shaped by strong influences of the Western liberal model alongside significant interventionist tendencies, which have been intensified by the polarized political environment. Journalism has long played a central role in shaping national discourse, and journalists have historically operated with a relatively high degree of freedom and personal safety. Yet rising employment insecurity and a hostile environment, marked by discursive attacks on the news media and threats to public broadcasting, have increasingly challenged journalistic autonomy and safety in recent years.

The fieldwork for this study took place between July 2021 and October 2023, concluding just before the outbreak of the war. This period was marked by the final stages of the COVID-19 crisis, a fifth round of national elections in less than four years, mass protests over the government's proposed judicial overhaul, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ongoing corruption trial, including two media-related cases. Against this backdrop, the survey reveals a journalistic field that upholds key professional norms and roles, while contending with growing pressures.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The Israeli sample is predominantly male (66.9%), reflecting the gender distribution of the country's journalistic workforce. The average age of journalists in the sample is 47.8 years ($SD = 12.9$; Median = 46). Most journalists have completed higher education: 42.9% hold a Bachelor's degree, 31.9% a Master's degree, and 2% a Doctorate. Over half (55.5%) have received professional education or training in journalism. Among them, 50.9% studied at a university or college, 63.2% completed an apprenticeship or cadetship, and 52.8% participated in short-term courses.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

The majority of Israeli journalists in the sample work for national or transnational media (89.7%), while only 10.0% are employed by local or regional outlets. In terms of media ownership, most journalists (78.1%) are affiliated with private or commercial media, followed by 11.4% who work for public service media. Others are employed by non-profit, state-run (e.g., Israeli Army Radio), or community media. Regarding employer type, 32.4% of journalists work for organizations with a newspaper background, 28.1% for internet-native platforms, and smaller proportions are employed in television (16.1%), radio (9.4%), and magazines (7.4%). Only a third (33%) report working on a specific beat or subject area.

About half of the journalists (51.2%) have no management role, while 30.7% occupy middle management positions, and 18.2% are in top management. In terms of work experience, journalists in the sample have worked in the profession for an average of 20.6 years ($SD = 12.1$; Median = 19). Their average weekly workload is relatively high, at 51.8 hours ($SD = 17.2$; Median = 48; for those in full-time employment).

Employment conditions reflect a mix of stability and precarity. While 29.3% of journalists hold full-time permanent contracts, a larger group (45.5%) are employed on full-time fixed-term contracts. Freelance or self-employed journalists comprise 17.1% of the sample, and only a small minority work part-time or under other arrangements. Nearly half (46.4%) of the respondents report having additional sources of income outside journalism. A considerable share (44.9%) report belonging to a union.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Verbal threats were the most common safety issues reported by Israeli journalists, with more than half experiencing demeaning or hateful speech (sometimes, often, or very often) and over 45% encountering public discrediting of their work (see Table 1). Although more severe threats – such as surveillance, stalking, or legal action – were less frequent, they were not negligible. Concerns about mental and emotional well-being were relatively common (37.8%), and almost a third of the journalists expressed worry about their physical safety (see Table 2). Over one in four journalists feared losing their job within the coming year, highlighting a significant sense of job insecurity. A striking 75.3% of journalists were concerned that those who harm journalists in Israel often go unpunished.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	334	12.3%	11.7%	32.6%	27.2%	16.2%
Public discrediting of your work	336	8.6%	7.7%	28.9%	32.4%	22.3%
Surveillance	328	3.7%	6.7%	17.4%	20.4%	51.8%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	334	0.0%	0.9%	6.0%	13.8%	79.3%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	334	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	1.5%	98.2%
Legal actions against you because of your work	335	0.6%	2.4%	13.1%	33.4%	50.4%
Stalking	335	1.8%	1.5%	8.4%	22.7%	65.7%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	336	1.8%	2.7%	14.9%	38.1%	42.6%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	335	0.0%	0.9%	2.7%	8.7%	87.8%
Other physical attacks	336	0.6%	0.0%	1.8%	11.0%	86.6%
Intimidation that targets family	336	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	6.5%	90.5%

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	336	26.2%	2.71	1.20
Concerned about physical well-being	336	31.8%	2.74	1.26
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	336	37.8%	2.88	1.28
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Israel go unpunished	336	75.3%	3.98	0.99

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

Israeli journalists strongly support monitorial and interventionist roles, with particularly high importance placed on monitoring and scrutinizing those in power, shining a light on society's problems, and counteracting disinformation (see Table 3). Roles related to social advocacy, public voice, and future-oriented reporting also received broad endorsement. In contrast, collaborative roles (such as supporting government policy or portraying leaders positively) were valued by only a small minority. The detached observer role received only moderate support.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	336	39.6%	3.04	1.30
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	336	81.5%	4.23	0.97
Shine a light on society's problems	336	90.8%	4.44	0.86
Motivate people to participate in politics	336	31.5%	2.80	1.31
Provide analysis of current affairs	336	72.9%	3.98	1.06
Let people express their views	336	67.3%	3.90	1.11
Provide information people need to form political opinion	336	73.5%	3.96	1.25
Advocate for social change	336	68.5%	3.92	1.14
Influence public opinion	336	73.8%	4.01	1.11
Set the political agenda	336	52.4%	3.37	1.29
Promote peace and tolerance	336	64.9%	3.79	1.23
Educate the audience	336	35.1%	2.88	1.37
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	336	74.4%	3.98	1.05
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	336	79.5%	4.15	1.06
Support national development	336	43.8%	3.16	1.31
Support government policy	336	6.3%	1.60	0.98
Convey a positive image of political leaders	336	5.4%	1.52	0.92
Provide entertainment and relaxation	336	39.3%	2.91	1.34
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	336	57.7%	3.57	1.23
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	336	41.4%	3.03	1.36
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	336	60.4%	3.67	1.23
Support efforts to protect public health	336	65.5%	3.76	1.21
Counteract disinformation	336	91.1%	4.53	0.82
Discuss future implications of current events	336	81.8%	4.24	0.96

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

Israeli journalists expressed mixed views on epistemological questions (see Table 4). While 62.4% agreed that it is possible to represent objective reality in reporting, a nearly equal proportion (59.2%) believed that interpretation (i.e., involving subjective evaluation) is necessary to make sense of facts and 45.8% think it is impossible to fully withhold personal beliefs from reporting. Only a minority (30.4%) supported the absolutist notion that things are either true or false, with no in-between. These findings suggest that while most journalists value objectivity, many also acknowledge the complex, constructed nature of truth in journalistic practice.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	306	59.2%	3.56	0.96
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	306	37.3%	3.04	1.04
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	306	45.8%	3.11	1.15
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	306	30.4%	2.81	1.13
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	306	62.4%	3.60	0.99

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

Israeli journalists expressed a strong orientation toward professional ethical standards. While there is some openness to contextual considerations, professional norms remain the dominant ethical compass for most respondents (see Table 5). At the same time, many expressed conditional acceptance of controversial reporting methods – particularly the use of hidden recording devices and confidential documents – in specific circumstances (see Table 6). The data suggest that while Israeli journalists uphold strong professional ethics, many are willing to make pragmatic exceptions, especially when reporting involves powerful actors.

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	336	57.7%	3.64	1.11
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	336	60.7%	3.49	1.03
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	336	26.2%	2.62	1.16
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	336	11.0%	2.07	1.07

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	336	1.2%	59.5%
Using hidden recording devices	336	19.6%	71.7%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	336	19.0%	50.9%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	336	7.7%	60.7%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	336	1.5%	36.9%
Paying people for confidential information	336	1.8%	58.0%
Accepting money from sources	336	0.6%	6.8%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	336	0.9%	21.1%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	336	0.6%	16.4%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	336	0.0%	11.6%

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

Israeli journalists reported high levels of editorial autonomy in their day-to-day work, with over three-quarters indicating that they enjoy a great deal or complete freedom in choosing and framing stories (see Table 7). However, only 42.9% expressed similar confidence in the overall level of media freedom in Israel.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	327	76.5%	3.97	0.88
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	327	77.1%	4.11	0.85
Media freedom in Israel	326	42.9%	3.33	0.81

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Israeli journalists identified journalism ethics and personal values as the most influential factors shaping their work (see Table 8). Editorial supervisors, time constraints, and resource availability were also considered important. In contrast, external influences – such as political actors, government censorship, and business interests – were generally perceived as weak.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	301	40.2%	3.11	1.23
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	298	62.1%	3.67	1.29
The business managers of the news organization	284	38.4%	2.99	1.45
The owners of the news organization	274	25.2%	2.36	1.49
Editorial policy	288	40.3%	3.01	1.43
Advertising considerations	288	17.7%	2.08	1.32
Profit expectations	289	19.4%	2.19	1.37
Audience research and data	300	45.3%	3.17	1.37
Availability of news-gathering resources	297	54.5%	3.41	1.30
Time limits	310	60.3%	3.69	1.21
Journalism ethics	313	80.5%	4.16	1.01
Self-censorship	307	35.2%	2.87	1.34
Personal values and beliefs	311	69.5%	3.94	1.14
Colleagues in other media	310	15.5%	2.35	1.09
Friends, acquaintances and family	312	7.4%	2.09	0.95
Feedback from the audience	314	24.5%	2.73	1.10
Competing news organizations	314	24.8%	2.67	1.15
Media laws and regulation	287	24.4%	2.53	1.26
Access to information	309	53.1%	3.35	1.25
Government censorship	282	12.1%	1.95	1.15
Government officials	287	8.7%	1.68	1.08
Politicians	291	10.0%	1.78	1.11
Business people	288	6.6%	1.67	0.99
Public relations	306	13.1%	2.22	1.10
Relationships with news sources	298	33.9%	2.86	1.23
Police	282	5.3%	1.55	0.95
Issue advocacy groups	292	6.5%	1.71	0.99
Religious groups and institutions	288	5.9%	1.50	0.94
Military	282	9.2%	1.66	1.05

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.)