

# Nepal

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## INTRODUCTION

Nepal has faced ongoing political instability, with frequent leadership changes and persistent deadlock between major parties. Although elections continue to take place, many people are increasingly frustrated, mainly due to widespread corruption and the government's failure to deliver. Over the past 30 years, the country has undergone significant political shifts. After a decade-long Maoist conflict (1996–2006), Nepal transitioned from a monarchy to a federal republic. Nevertheless, it still struggles to build strong institutions and to transform a society deeply rooted in patriarchy and feudal traditions.

The journalistic landscape in Nepal has also seen significant shifts in recent years. Traditionally, Nepal enjoyed a relatively pluralistic media environment, especially following the 2006 democratic movement and the abolition of the monarchy. However, concerns have grown over political interference, media capture, and increasing online harassment of journalists, particularly women and those critical of the government. These challenges have been further compounded by the concentration of media ownership and the growing alignment of news outlets with political interests, which have narrowed editorial independence. At the same time, the rise of digital disinformation and heightened state scrutiny of online content have introduced new threats to press freedom.

The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a lasting blow to Nepal's media industry, with its effects still being felt. Several FM radio stations and television networks shut down operations or downsized their workforce, leading to a significant reduction in editorial content. Major media houses also scaled back by cutting pages, laying off employees, and shutting down regional editions.

The fieldwork of this study was conducted between late 2022 and early 2024, following the contentious local and federal elections in 2022 that saw emerging political alliances and the growing influence of populist rhetoric. During this period, Nepal was also navigating the social and economic aftermath of the pandemic, while public debate intensified around issues such as gender-based violence, caste-based discrimination, and the regulation of digital platforms. Though some positive steps were taken to strengthen democratic institutions, the overall environment for critical journalism remains fraught with political pressure, legal uncertainty, and social polarization.

## BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

In the case of Nepal, the journalism profession is male-dominated: 81.8% of valid respondents identified as men, 17.7% as women, and 0.5% as another gender. This distribution closely mirrors the database by the Federation of Nepali Journalists, which places the proportion of women journalists at approximately 18%, suggesting that the sample is broadly representative of the country's gender dynamics in the field. On average, journalists in the sample were 38.0 years old (SD = 8.7; Median = 36), reflecting a relatively young to mid-career cohort.

They are generally well educated. The sample shows, 45.7% held a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, 28.6% a Master's degree or equivalent, and 21.2% had completed high school. A small portion (3.8%) had some university education without completing a degree, and only 0.8% had not completed high school. A total of 99.5% reported receiving formal education or professional training in journalism. Among those, 31.2% had attended a university or college for journalism training, 79.5% had completed short-term courses, and a substantial portion received training through apprenticeships or cadetships. These figures suggest that many journalists underwent multiple forms of professional preparation.

## JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

Journalists in our sample reported an average of 10.7 years of professional experience (SD = 5.6; Median = 9), indicating a moderately experienced workforce. The average working week for journalists was 53.3 hours (SD = 12.0; Median = 50; for those in full-time employment), based on 387 valid responses. These extended hours suggest a demanding work environment that may contribute to stress or work-life imbalance.

In terms of the background of their main employers, journalists primarily worked for, the largest group worked in radio outlets (27.6%), followed by those employed in newspapers (23.4%), internet-native media (21.1%), and television (17.1%). Smaller segments worked for news agencies (5.0%) or magazines (4.5%). A small minority (1.3%) reported not having a main employer at all, reflecting a degree of independence or freelancing in the profession.

Journalists in the sample had on average 10.7 years of professional experience (SD = 5.6; Median = 9), pointing to a relatively mid-career workforce. They also reported working long hours, with an average of 50.9 hours per week (SD = 13.5; Median = 50). Only 23.4% of journalists said they focused on a specific beat or subject area, while the majority (76.6%) worked across a variety of topics. This reflects a generalist approach to reporting, which may be shaped by the structure and staffing patterns of media organizations.

Employment conditions suggest a sector marked by precarity. Just 14.0% of journalists held full-time permanent contracts, and less than 1% were in part-time permanent positions. In contrast, a large portion were on fixed-term contracts – 62.2% full-time and 18.1% part-time. A small number worked as freelancers or were self-employed (2.6%), and 2.3% reported other types of employment. These patterns highlight the limited job security for most journalists.

Nearly one-third of the journalists (31.2%) reported that they do not earn their full income from journalism, while 68.8% said they rely entirely on journalism for their livelihood. This suggests that for a significant group, journalism alone is not financially sustainable.

The working environment appears to be stressful for many. While 7.3% of journalists said they never felt stressed and 28.0% rarely did, a large number reported regular stress. 44.4% said they sometimes felt stressed, 12.4% reported feeling stressed often, and 7.8% said they were stressed very often over the past six months.

## SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Verbal attacks such as demeaning or hateful speech or public discrediting of journalists' work fared among the most common safety threats experienced by Nepali journalists (see Table 1). However, despite being experienced less frequently, more dangerous threats – such as legal actions, physical attacks, or surveillance – remain deeply concerning. These experiences are also reflected in the concerns expressed by Nepali journalists; nearly one in five were worried about losing their job, and a significant share were concerned about their physical or emotional well-being (see Table 2). Moreover, nearly one in four feared that those who harm journalists in Nepal would go unpunished.

**TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS**

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	396	5.6%	3.3%	26.0%	30.1%	35.1%
Public discrediting of your work	395	5.6%	4.6%	17.7%	27.6%	44.6%
Surveillance	396	2.5%	1.5%	14.4%	20.5%	61.1%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	397	3.8%	5.3%	12.6%	16.9%	61.5%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	397	0.0%	0.0%	1.8%	2.8%	95.5%
Legal actions against you because of your work	397	0.0%	0.3%	1.0%	5.3%	93.5%
Stalking	396	2.3%	5.8%	9.8%	15.4%	66.7%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	397	1.5%	2.0%	18.6%	18.6%	59.2%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	397	0.0%	0.5%	1.3%	3.8%	94.5%
Other physical attacks	397	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	4.8%	94.0%
Coercion	398	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	7.3%	92.5%
Questioning of your personal morality	398	0.3%	0.3%	2.0%	5.8%	91.7%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	397	0.8%	1.0%	7.3%	11.3%	79.6%
Others disseminating your personal information	398	1.0%	0.3%	5.0%	17.3%	76.4%
Workplace bullying	398	0.0%	2.3%	3.5%	7.3%	86.9%
Abductions	398	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	1.3%	98.5%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	398	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	97.7%
Intimidation that targets family	398	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	1.5%	98.2%

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	397	18.4%	2.35	1.15
Concerned about physical well-being	396	8.6%	1.82	0.96
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	396	28.3%	2.61	1.16
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Nepal go unpunished	398	24.6%	2.64	1.16

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

Being a detached observer ranked as the most important journalistic role among Nepali journalists, with 86.4% considering it very important (see Table 3). This strong endorsement highlights the continued value placed on objectivity and impartiality in the profession. At the same time, interventionist roles – such as advocating for social change, promoting peace and tolerance, and educating the public – also received high levels of support. Politically assertive roles, including supporting government policy or portraying political leaders positively, were among the least valued. Nonetheless, even for these roles, a considerable share of journalists – often around a quarter – still saw them as very or extremely important.

**TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES**

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	397	86.4%	4.37	0.82
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	394	73.4%	3.96	1.09
Shine a light on society's problems	395	81.5%	4.25	1.02
Motivate people to participate in politics	394	53.0%	3.48	1.43
Provide analysis of current affairs	376	77.7%	4.05	1.00
Let people express their views	396	85.6%	4.33	0.94
Provide information people need to form political opinion	395	68.1%	3.94	1.11
Advocate for social change	394	80.7%	4.21	0.98
Influence public opinion	395	63.5%	3.83	1.23
Set the political agenda	393	57.3%	3.60	1.41
Promote peace and tolerance	394	80.5%	4.21	0.91
Educate the audience	396	81.8%	4.21	0.90
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	394	77.4%	4.13	1.01
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	390	76.4%	4.07	1.02
Support national development	395	75.7%	4.08	1.08
Support government policy	389	54.8%	3.57	1.20
Convey a positive image of political leaders	394	38.1%	2.95	1.52
Provide entertainment and relaxation	396	52.3%	3.42	1.24
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	396	53.8%	3.51	1.16
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	394	77.7%	4.16	0.98
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	392	64.0%	3.73	1.15
Support efforts to protect public health	396	77.0%	4.07	0.97
Counteract disinformation	396	78.0%	4.15	1.01
Discuss future implications of current events	381	74.5%	4.03	1.04

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

The results show mixed views on journalistic knowledge. Most journalists agreed that interpretation is key to understanding facts and that facts should speak for themselves (see Table 4). While over half believed objective reality can be represented (57.9%), many also acknowledged that truth is shaped by power (51.9%) and supported transparency of journalists' standpoints (62.0%). Fewer journalists endorsed relying on intuition or instincts in reporting.

**TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES**

	N	Agree/strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	394	69.8%	3.76	1.16
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	395	51.9%	3.36	1.23
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	394	30.2%	2.92	1.04
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	394	54.6%	3.58	0.90
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	394	57.9%	3.55	1.10
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	394	17.0%	2.63	0.99
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	393	25.7%	2.69	1.15
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	371	60.9%	3.58	1.15
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	379	58.0%	3.49	1.19
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	337	62.0%	3.61	1.07
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	339	74.9%	3.93	1.00

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 journalists favour strict adherence to professional standards ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ), even in challenging situations. Support declines when ethics are tied to specific contexts ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) or personal judgment ( $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ). Controversial methods like impersonation or hidden recordings are rarely seen as always justified, but are sometimes accepted. Practices involving unverified information, payments, or use of private materials remain broadly unsupported, reflecting an overall commitment to ethical restraint.

**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	398	86.9%	4.29	0.95
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	396	66.2%	3.82	1.21
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	397	22.7%	2.55	1.00
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	398	31.4%	2.53	1.25

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	397	4.0%	35.3%
Using hidden recording devices	396	2.3%	47.5%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	397	2.0%	24.7%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	397	3.0%	29.5%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	396	1.0%	16.7%
Paying people for confidential information	394	1.3%	20.8%
Accepting money from sources	396	0.5%	3.0%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	394	0.8%	5.1%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	397	4.3%	24.9%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	397	1.0%	6.5%

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

Nepali journalists reported a moderate degree of editorial autonomy in their work (see Table 7). About two-thirds said they had complete or a great deal of freedom in selecting stories and deciding which aspects to emphasize. However, perceptions of overall media freedom in Nepal were notably lower.

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

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	396	62.9%	3.79	0.91
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	396	67.9%	3.90	0.87
Media freedom in [country]	397	52.9%	3.52	0.79

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

## EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Journalists in Nepal reported a variety of influences on their editorial decisions (see Table 8). Time limits, media laws and regulations, government censorship, and access to information were among the most influential factors. Professional norms, such as journalism ethics and personal values, also ranked high. In contrast, influence from colleagues in other media, friends or family, religious groups, and military or paramilitary actors was reported to be minimal.

**TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES**

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	385	37.7%	2.90	1.10
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	385	21.6%	2.75	1.08
The business managers of the news organization	386	23.1%	2.70	1.20
The owners of the news organization	379	32.2%	2.94	1.35
Editorial policy	392	45.7%	3.13	1.09
Advertising considerations	365	37.3%	3.08	1.28
Profit expectations	374	52.7%	3.22	1.24
Audience research and data	369	30.1%	2.79	1.13
Availability of news-gathering resources	382	41.9%	3.12	0.99
Time limits	393	64.4%	3.67	1.15
Journalism ethics	392	53.8%	3.46	1.08
Self-censorship	389	45.0%	3.26	1.10
Personal values and beliefs	388	51.5%	3.43	1.18
Colleagues in other media	382	16.5%	2.36	1.15
Friends, acquaintances and family	387	18.1%	2.24	1.28
Feedback from the audience	390	37.9%	2.97	1.41
Competing news organizations	390	20.0%	2.52	1.16
Media laws and regulation	392	58.9%	3.51	1.13
Access to information	393	62.1%	3.71	1.19
Government censorship	390	60.5%	3.52	1.12
Government officials	387	54.8%	3.55	1.40
Politicians	384	48.4%	3.29	1.32
Business people	385	47.3%	3.26	1.34
Public relations	363	24.2%	2.76	1.17
Relationships with news sources	390	38.2%	3.06	1.24
Police	386	20.5%	2.65	1.15
Issue advocacy groups	376	24.2%	2.56	1.17
Scientists or health experts	375	40.7%	2.17	1.23
Religious groups and institutions	356	18.9%	2.23	1.08
Military	131	9.8%	1.47	0.88
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	232	5.3%	2.16	1.39
Organized crime and criminal groups	94	23.7%	1.60	1.19
Terrorist groups	376	11.7%	3.21	1.14

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.)