

Philippines

SOFIA CONTRERAS TAN & EDSON TANDOC JR.

INTRODUCTION

Survey data was collected between April and October 2023, about a year into the presidency of Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr., son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr. This period followed the turbulent 2016–2022 administration of Rodrigo Duterte, which significantly undermined press freedom in the Philippines. Duterte’s government employed disinformation tactics during his campaign and throughout his term, using threats and propaganda to suppress criticism and bolster support for controversial policies, such as his deadly “War on Drugs.” This led to widespread media self-censorship and a decline in public trust in journalism. One of the most symbolic blows to press freedom during this time was the non-renewal of the broadcast license of ABS-CBN, then the country’s largest television network, resulting in its shutdown and the closure of its regional bureaus, rendering thousands of media workers jobless.

The Philippine press used to be among the freest in Asia, until Ferdinand Marcos Sr. declared martial law in 1972. His regime saw journalists imprisoned, media outlets seized, and press freedom crushed. While the post-Marcos era brought periods of recovery, the media landscape has remained fragile, marked by persistent threats to journalists’ safety, credibility, and job security. Journalists in the Philippines have long faced harassment, intimidation, and physical violence due to their work. In the most tragic example, the 2009 Ampatuan massacre in Maguindanao claimed the lives of 58 people, including 32 journalists and media workers. More recently, journalists have also been red-tagged – falsely accused of being communist sympathizers or insurgents – placing them at heightened risk of surveillance, harassment, and even violence. While the Marcos Jr. administration has been perceived as more moderate than Duterte’s, findings from this survey suggest that challenges to press freedom remain. Journalists identified media violence as a top concern and emphasized that combating disinformation is now their most critical professional responsibility.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The respondents have an average age of 39.5 years (SD = 12.5; Median = 38) and 51.1% are female. Filipino journalists tend to be well-educated, with 94.1% having at least a bachelor’s degree. Most Filipino journalists have received journalism-specific training or education (82.3%) – of these, 82.9% received that through university, 75.0% through cadetship/apprenticeship, and 72.9% through a short-term course.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In terms of the background of their main employers, newspapers are the main employers of journalists in the Philippines with a third of journalists (31.4%) working for them, followed by 18.9% for television organizations, 18.0% for online native media, 9.0% for radio outlets, and 7.5% for news agencies. Only a few Filipino journalists worked for magazine companies (1.5%) and organizations with a telecommunications background (0.3%). The remaining 7.3% claimed that they did not have a main employer. More than two thirds of Filipino journalists (71.6%) were members of professional associations.

In terms of media reach, 75.1% of the journalists mainly worked for (trans)national media, while 18.8% primarily catered to local or regional media. Rather than focusing on a single beat, the majority of Filipino journalists (60.8%) worked on a variety of beats or subject areas. The average working week of Filipino full-time journalists was 37.0 hours (SD = 19.1; Median = 40). The majority of the respondents (65.0%) reported they felt stressed out at work often or very often.

On average, Filipino journalists had 15.0 years of professional experience (SD = 11.2; Median = 12), with more than half of the interviewed journalists having a full-time contract (62.7% permanently and 7.1% temporarily employed). Less than a quarter (16.3%) worked as freelancers or were self-employed, and an additional 5.0% had other forms of employment. A few had part-time employment: 4.7% had permanent contracts and 4.1% had temporary contracts. The prevalence of temporary or fixed contracts and freelance employment, and with 53.3% of journalists reporting additional income sources outside of journalism, suggest that Filipino journalists suffer under intense economic pressures and are plagued by job insecurity.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

When asked about the common safety threats they encounter, many Filipino journalists report they experience verbal attacks, such as demeaning or hateful speech, and public discrediting of their work (see Table 1). These, along with job insecurity, contribute to widespread concerns about their emotional and mental well-being (see Table 2). The threat of impunity also exacerbates these problems: Almost all Filipino journalists (93.2%) are strongly concerned that those who harm journalists in the Philippines go unpunished.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	341	4.4%	12.9%	42.5%	22.6%	17.6%
Public discrediting of your work	341	4.1%	11.7%	31.4%	28.7%	24.0%
Surveillance	340	3.2%	7.9%	20.0%	27.9%	40.9%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	341	2.6%	6.5%	16.7%	20.5%	53.7%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	341	0.3%	0.9%	2.1%	4.7%	92.1%
Legal actions against you because of your work	341	1.2%	1.8%	10.0%	13.2%	73.9%
Stalking	341	2.1%	6.5%	15.0%	21.1%	55.4%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	341	3.5%	8.2%	18.2%	23.5%	46.6%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	340	1.2%	1.5%	7.1%	10.6%	79.7%
Other physical attacks	339	0.3%	0.6%	4.7%	7.4%	87.0%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	339	1.2%	2.7%	12.4%	20.6%	63.1%
Others disseminating your personal information	341	2.3%	4.7%	14.4%	24.9%	53.7%
Workplace bullying	340	1.5%	3.8%	15.9%	17.9%	60.9%
Intimidation that targets family	339	1.2%	0.6%	7.1%	12.7%	78.5%

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	30.7%	2.68	1.30
Concerned about physical well-being	336	65.5%	3.65	1.19
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	335	74.0%	3.83	1.14
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Philippines go unpunished	336	93.2%	4.61	0.70

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

Filipino journalists identify countering disinformation and educating the public as their most important professional roles. Not only do they rate these responsibilities as highly important, but the low standard deviations in their responses also indicate a strong consensus across the profession (see Table 3). In contrast, Filipino journalists strongly disagreed on the importance of motivating people to participate in politics, and they similarly disagreed on the roles that were ranked the least important – conveying a positive image of political leaders and supporting government policy.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	339	52.8%	3.48	1.20
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	339	85.8%	4.35	0.96
Shine a light on society's problems	339	89.4%	4.51	0.82
Motivate people to participate in politics	339	61.9%	3.62	1.31
Provide analysis of current affairs	339	85.0%	4.32	.880
Let people express their views	339	86.1%	4.35	0.85
Provide information people need to form political opinion	339	82.6%	4.23	1.05
Advocate for social change	339	81.7%	4.27	0.97
Influence public opinion	339	67.3%	3.79	1.12
Set the political agenda	339	43.7%	3.14	1.30
Promote peace and tolerance	339	80.5%	4.21	0.97
Educate the audience	339	97.1%	4.75	0.57
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	341	88.0%	4.35	0.78
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	341	83.0%	4.27	0.92
Support national development	341	76.2%	4.08	1.01
Support government policy	341	32.8%	3.01	1.18
Convey a positive image of political leaders	341	12.9%	2.00	1.22
Provide entertainment and relaxation	341	34.3%	3.04	1.19
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	341	62.5%	3.79	1.07
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	341	59.2%	3.67	1.10
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	341	62.8%	3.80	1.03
Support efforts to protect public health	341	88.3%	4.43	0.90
Counteract disinformation	341	97.1%	4.83	0.45
Discuss future implications of current events	341	89.4%	4.45	0.74

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 divergent beliefs of interpretation being a necessity to make sense of facts and being able to represent objective reality in reporting prompted the strongest agreement among Filipino journalists. They were, however, in disagreement over truth being inevitably shaped by those in power and being black and white with no in-between.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	328	86.6%	4.11	0.83
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	327	50.5%	3.28	1.21
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	328	40.5%	3.10	1.08
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	328	51.8%	3.41	1.14
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	327	75.2%	3.90	0.98

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

More journalists in the Philippines agreed on ethical absolutism than relativism (see Table 5), specifically ethics guided by professional standards instead of situational and personal considerations, though 70.9% are willing to disregard professional standards if extraordinary circumstances require it. These conflicting beliefs can be seen in the acceptance of controversial reporting methods (see Table 6), like the use of hidden recording devices and confidential documents without authorization, while some practices, like the publication of stories with unverified information and acceptance of money from sources, are almost universally condemned.

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	340	80.6%	4.07	0.96
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	340	70.9%	3.77	0.95
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	339	48.1%	3.25	1.21
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	339	26.3%	2.64	1.22

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	341	0.9%	17.3%
Using hidden recording devices	341	2.3%	56.3%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	341	2.9%	48.4%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	341	3.2%	47.2%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	341	0.9%	22.0%
Paying people for confidential information	341	1.2%	24.6%
Accepting money from sources	341	0.9%	6.7%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	341	1.2%	41.9%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	341	2.1%	22.9%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	341	0.3%	7.3%

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

The majority of Filipino journalists reported they have a great deal of freedom when it comes to selecting news stories and deciding where to put emphasis in the story, though they rated the overall media freedom in the Philippines to be low (see Table 7).

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	336	66.1%	3.81	0.83
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	335	73.1%	3.95	0.82
Media freedom in Philippines	336	39.0%	3.32	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

Filipino journalists found journalism ethics and the availability of news-gathering resources to be the most influential internal factors in news production (see Table 8). Among the external factors, most journalists considered access to information and media laws and regulation as extremely or very influential on editorial decisions.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	318	34.0%	3.00	1.13
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	327	69.1%	3.83	1.02
The business managers of the news organization	316	50.0%	3.32	1.23
The owners of the news organization	313	62.6%	3.69	1.22
Editorial policy	332	76.2%	4.04	0.92
Advertising considerations	292	32.5%	2.88	1.26
Profit expectations	296	33.1%	2.80	1.30
Audience research and data	323	50.5%	3.44	1.15
Availability of news-gathering resources	331	81.6%	4.08	0.88
Time limits	328	64.6%	3.77	0.98
Journalism ethics	334	90.1%	4.44	0.79
Self-censorship	314	32.5%	2.92	1.25
Personal values and beliefs	326	65.0%	3.75	1.22
Colleagues in other media	324	28.4%	2.80	1.24
Friends, acquaintances and family	295	23.7%	2.52	1.28
Feedback from the audience	326	46.3%	3.37	1.17
Competing news organizations	322	36.0%	3.02	1.20
Media laws and regulation	330	67.0%	3.80	1.07
Access to information	330	78.8%	4.16	0.93
Government censorship	305	31.5%	2.68	1.35
Government officials	316	29.1%	2.80	1.28
Politicians	303	24.1%	2.55	1.31
Business people	307	30.3%	2.80	1.29
Public relations	314	28.7%	2.77	1.23
Relationships with news sources	325	46.8%	3.33	1.20
Police	287	22.0%	2.47	1.28
Issue advocacy groups	324	37.7%	3.07	1.26
Scientists or health experts	313	59.4%	3.58	1.16
Religious groups and institutions	291	23.7%	2.51	1.29
Military	273	20.1%	2.38	1.29
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	253	15.0%	2.08	1.25
Organized crime and criminal groups	233	18.0%	2.17	1.35
Terrorist groups	223	15.7%	2.00	1.24

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.)