

Thailand

CHANAPA NOONARK, KULTIDA SAYPROM & WARAT KARUCHIT

INTRODUCTION

In 2025, Thailand struggles with political, economic, and social challenges. The government led by the Pheu Thai party has been struggling with a crisis of faith among voters. Thailand remains in economic stagnation caused by the government's instability and underwhelming growth of its tourism industry. In addition to this, Thailand's aging population is growing rapidly, which leads to a potential labor shortage. This issue also possibly causes a rise in healthcare expenditures.

The journalistic situation in Thailand faces challenges due to shifts in the media landscape caused by technology disruptions and changes in consumer behavior. Many traditional news outlets have shut down, while others have adapted and shifted towards transformations in digital media. There are now more online news agencies and citizen journalists due to the efforts of some journalists working together, while some journalists, either volunteered or laid off, turned to become freelancers. However, others are facing the risk of working in the borderland. To attract more readers and to compete with online content creators, news content of Thai journalism is increasingly associated with sensational stories, such as superstitious beliefs, lottery numbers, and personal relationships.

This study collected data between 2021 and 2023 during the general elections. In 2023, a general election was held with much drama once a parliamentary vote was made for the next prime minister of Thailand. The Pheu Thai party was able to cobble together a controversial coalition to form a new government. The COVID-19 pandemic was another big challenge regarding the collection of data.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

According to our sample of Thai journalists, these are the demographic characteristics of the survey participants: Most participants are women (60.5%). The average age was 37.6 (SD = 8.7; Median = 36). Approximately 76.0 % of respondents completed a bachelor's degree, followed by 12.0% who completed a master's degree, and finally, 9.6% that completed high school. Moreover, more than half of the respondents (53.6%) completed formal education or professional training in journalism. About 81.5% of them completed a journalism apprenticeship/cadetship, 79.6% completed education or training from a university or college, and lastly, 56.1% completed short-term courses.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

On average, the respondents reported that they worked as a journalist for 9.0 years (SD = 7.2; Median = 7). Most Thai journalists (44.5%) worked for television, followed by Internet native (26.8%) and radio (16.3%), respectively. Very few journalists worked for newspapers and magazines (2.6%, 1.1% respectively). Finally, 2.9% of participants reported having no main employer. About 48.8% of Thai respondents illustrated that they have no management role in editorial hierarchy, followed by a middle management role (43.9%), and a top management role (7.3%). Most respondents (54.7%) worked for local or regional media, followed by national or transnational media (37.5%). Only 7.8% reported that they worked for no main media. Moreover, a majority of participants (36.0%) reported that they worked for private or commercial media, followed by state-run media (29.6%), community media (18.5%), and public service media (12.4%), while 0.3% of participants reported that they worked for no main media.

In terms of current working situation of Thai journalists, most had a full-time permanent contract (72.7%) while 16.1% were freelancers or self-employed. Journalists in full-time employment worked 41.6 hours in an average week (SD = 17.7; Median = 40). A majority of participants (71.6%) worked on a variety of beats or subject areas rather than on a specific one. Moreover, about 7.3% of the respondents reported they felt stressed out at work as a journalist frequently or very frequently during the previous six months. Some of them (35.9%) are stressed out at work sometimes, while only 7.6% felt they felt no stress. The study also showed that Thai respondents (15.1%) received additional income by working in various sectors. Also, only 28.3% of participants were members of professional associations.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Table 1 shows the respondents’ overall rating of safety in the previous five years. The findings showed that no one experienced abductions, but some were arrested, detained or imprisoned, and some were physically assaulted. Furthermore, several Thai journalists faced threats such as demeaning comments or hate speech. These safety issues reflect concerns related to work (see Table 2). More than half of participants were concerned about their physical well-being. Almost half of the participants were concerned that those who harm journalists would go unpunished. Many were concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing. Lastly, worrying about losing their job in journalism within the next 12 months was the journalists’ least concerning issue.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	384	3.9%	10.9%	27.6%	20.1%	37.5%
Public discrediting of your work	384	1.8%	7.3%	19.3%	21.4%	50.3%
Surveillance	383	1.8%	6.3%	13.1%	17.8%	61.1%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	384	2.6%	5.7%	11.7%	21.1%	58.9%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	384	0.8%	1.8%	2.3%	8.3%	86.7%
Legal actions against you because of your work	384	0.8%	2.1%	2.9%	12.0%	82.3%
Stalking	384	0.3%	2.6%	4.7%	12.0%	80.5%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	384	1.3%	3.4%	7.3%	17.7%	70.3%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	384	0.8%	3.4%	3.1%	7.8%	84.9%
Other physical attacks	384	1.0%	2.1%	2.6%	10.4%	83.9%
Coercion	384	1.0%	3.4%	7.0%	15.1%	73.4%
Questioning of your personal morality	384	0.3%	3.4%	2.6%	12.2%	81.5%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	383	0.3%	2.6%	4.2%	15.1%	77.8%
Others disseminating your personal information	384	0.0%	4.2%	6.8%	15.1%	74.0%
Workplace bullying	384	1.8%	3.6%	9.4%	15.4%	69.8%
Abductions	384	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	384	0.8%	1.8%	2.9%	10.4%	84.1%
Intimidation that targets family	384	0.5%	2.3%	2.3%	8.9%	85.9%

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	384	29.7%	3.03	1.04
Concerned about physical well-being	384	52.6%	3.42	1.06
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	384	45.8%	3.28	1.12
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Thailand go unpunished	384	47.7%	3.47	1.09

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

According to Table 3, most Thai participants strongly support journalistic roles, such as educating the audience, debunking disinformation, and exposing problems in society. On the other hand, conveying a positive image of political leaders was thought to be the least extremely or very important role in journalism.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	384	82.0%	4.20	0.78
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	384	80.7%	4.10	0.80
Shine a light on society’s problems	384	90.6%	4.42	0.69
Motivate people to participate in politics	384	69.8%	3.92	0.87
Provide analysis of current affairs	384	83.6%	4.20	0.75
Let people express their views	384	88.3%	4.34	0.72
Provide information people need to form political opinion	384	79.9%	4.20	0.82
Advocate for social change	384	76.3%	4.13	0.83
Influence public opinion	383	64.8%	3.82	0.81
Set the political agenda	384	60.9%	3.69	0.90
Promote peace and tolerance	384	79.2%	4.12	0.79
Educate the audience	384	92.4%	4.53	0.67
Point toward possible solutions to society’s problems	384	85.4%	4.31	0.74
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	384	83.9%	4.30	0.77
Support national development	384	83.1%	4.27	0.77
Support government policy	382	67.0%	3.81	0.90
Convey a positive image of political leaders	384	52.1%	3.51	1.05
Provide entertainment and relaxation	383	69.2%	3.88	0.86
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	384	78.6%	4.05	0.77
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	383	77.3%	4.04	0.75
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	384	68.2%	3.90	0.89
Support efforts to protect public health	384	87.2%	4.36	0.71
Counteract disinformation	384	90.9%	4.41	0.68
Discuss future implications of current events	384	72.7%	3.99	0.80

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

According to Journalistic epistemologies (See Table 4), most respondents strongly believed that journalists should maintain transparency in their work, and present information accurately to the community they are connected to. However, few participants agreed that it is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	384	87.5%	4.30	0.81
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	384	65.4%	3.76	0.93
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	384	11.7%	2.36	0.92
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	384	45.6%	3.38	0.98
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	384	81.0%	4.16	0.83
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	384	56.3%	3.27	1.26
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	384	51.6%	3.14	1.21
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	384	84.9%	4.12	0.94
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	384	94.3%	4.53	0.74
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	384	96.4%	4.60	0.68
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	384	91.7%	4.42	0.85

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

Thai journalists strongly agreed that ethical behavior should be determined by professional standards, and personal belief and specific situations should not affect what is ethical journalism (see Table 5). However, Thai participants had differing views on when it is justified to use unauthorized confidential business, government documents, and personal items. Also, Thai participants agreed that using hidden recording devices is acceptable on occasion (see Table 6).

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	384	96.9%	4.67	0.53
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	384	70.6%	3.85	1.00
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	384	57.0%	3.50	1.19
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	383	49.6%	3.35	1.21

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	384	1.3%	20.6%
Using hidden recording devices	384	1.0%	48.4%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	384	0.5%	19.0%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	384	0.8%	19.3%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	384	0.5%	18.2%
Paying people for confidential information	384	1.0%	24.5%
Accepting money from sources	384	2.6%	15.1%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	384	3.1%	41.9%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	384	6.5%	39.8%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	384	3.1%	18.0%

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

Overall, participants perceived media freedom in Thailand at a moderate level (see Table 7). Slightly more than one-third of participants reported that they had a great deal of or complete freedom in deciding on which aspects of a story to highlight and more generally in selecting news stories.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	384	34.6%	3.09	1.11
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	384	39.6%	3.10	1.07
Media freedom in Thailand	384	40.4%	3.21	1.05

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

According to Table 8, the results showed that organisational influences such as editorial supervisors and higher editors carry much more weight among journalists working in Thailand than procedural influences such as journalism ethics.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	380	44.7%	3.24	1.11
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	379	71.8%	3.93	0.95
The business managers of the news organization	383	68.1%	3.89	0.98
The owners of the news organization	382	68.6%	3.81	1.11
Editorial policy	382	67.3%	3.84	1.00
Advertising considerations	368	44.6%	3.25	1.23
Profit expectations	364	54.7%	3.48	1.20
Audience research and data	374	62.3%	3.64	1.12
Availability of news-gathering resources	381	70.1%	3.82	0.97
Time limits	380	67.1%	3.80	0.95
Journalism ethics	382	75.9%	4.00	0.99
Self-censorship	370	52.2%	3.51	0.98
Personal values and beliefs	370	45.4%	3.41	0.99
Colleagues in other media	379	30.1%	2.95	1.14
Friends, acquaintances and family	373	24.9%	2.79	1.11
Feedback from the audience	382	50.5%	3.35	1.17
Competing news organizations	375	43.2%	3.18	1.15
Media laws and regulation	380	67.1%	3.72	1.04
Access to information	378	67.5%	3.74	1.07
Government censorship	376	48.9%	3.36	1.09
Government officials	371	36.7%	3.15	1.14
Politicians	368	36.4%	3.05	1.22
Business people	367	30.2%	2.90	1.17
Public relations	374	37.7%	3.05	1.14
Relationships with news sources	374	55.1%	3.46	1.13
Police	368	28.3%	2.90	1.17
Issue advocacy groups	360	28.9%	2.83	1.19
Scientists or health experts	364	28.3%	3.10	1.18
Religious groups and institutions	353	40.4%	2.82	1.34
Military	333	34.6%	2.63	1.37
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	333	30.3%	2.60	1.35
Organized crime and criminal groups	326	28.8%	2.55	1.35
Terrorist groups	361	28.2%	2.85	1.12

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.)