

# United States

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## INTRODUCTION

When U.S. journalists were surveyed in the second half of 2023, the country was a year away from a divisive national election but had for years been exhibiting signs of political polarization. Long a global superpower, with stable political, economic, and social institutions, the U.S. was facing a crossroads between a post-pandemic path to democratic and neoliberal normalcy or an embrace of greater unilateralism, nativism, and individualism. These competing views of the country's identity inflected national, state, and local political and social life.

The U.S. has been characterized as a quintessential [liberal news media system](#), with an entrenched commercial orientation; an ingrained professional ethos, centered on 'objectivity' and strong legal autonomy, with the First Amendment as its foundation. The U.S. has had a diverse media environment, with a mix of national and local; print, broadcast, and online; legacy, partisan, and entrepreneurial journalism. However, the digital revolution – in combination with other economic forces – has [destabilized journalism](#), with jobs numbers in a sustained period of decline.

Journalists were [surveyed](#) during the Joseph Biden presidential administration – a time of relative “normalcy,” “quiet and calm”. These characterizations drew a contrast to the [previous disruptive years](#) of the Donald Trump presidency, when journalism was verbally attacked as “fake news” and “enemy of the people”, and to the coming second Trump term, starting in 2025, when again the Trump administration and likeminded politicians were actively hostile to legacy news media.

## BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The major of U.S. journalists (N = 1,326) identified as male (57.2% of the surveyed). The average age of journalists was 48.1 years (SD = 14.3, Median = 50). The majority completed higher education, with 71.6% holding a Bachelor's degree, 21.0% a Master's degree, and 0.7% a Doctorate. Approximately 5.2% had received some university training, and 1.5% had completed at least some high school education. Overall, 80.7% had formal journalism training, most frequently through university or college (84.9%), apprenticeships (46.3%), or short-term courses (35.9%).

## JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

Journalists in the US worked primarily for commercial news organizations (88.6%), with 8.0% working for non-profit and 3.2% for public media. The majority (94.6%) worked for local and regional media, with 5.4% working for national and international outlets. Regarding the background of their primary employer, 46.7% worked for an outlet focused on publishing newspapers, followed by television (27.9%), radio (10.0%), internet-native (7.0%), news agencies (3.9%), and magazines (3.0%). When it comes to beats, 32.7% had a specific beat assignment. They reported working on average 44.0 hours a week (SD= 4.9, Median = 44; for those in full-time employment), and have on average 20.8 years of professional experience (SD = 13.2, Median = 20). About 44.1% had no management role in the newsroom, 35.8% were middle managers, and 20.1% held top management roles.

For employment status, 75.4% of respondents held full-time and permanent contracts, 13.8% had full-time and fixed-term contracts, 1.9% had part-time contracts, and 2.4% worked as freelancers or were self-employed. Additionally, 20.5% reported having additional jobs outside of journalism. Over half of the journalists in the sample were members of a union or professional association (55.2%). A significant portion (59.5%) of journalists reported feeling stressed at work often or very often during the past six months, and 30.6% were sometimes stressed. Fewer than 10.0% of journalists rarely or never felt stressed at work.

## SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

U.S. journalists have long faced skepticism from socially marginalized groups, but populist hostility toward journalism has changed the landscape that journalists negotiate. Journalists reported attacks on their work and their reputations, with nearly half of journalists (46.4%) facing demeaning or hateful speech at least some of the time. Similarly, some journalists reported having their morality questioned, had threats and intimidation directed at them, and faced the public discrediting of their work at least sometimes (Table 1). Direct violence, detention, and raids remained rare in the U.S.

Nevertheless, 61.5% of journalists were concerned that those who harm journalists go unpunished. Threats and work-related concerns have taken a toll on many journalists, with nearly half reporting concerns about their emotional and mental wellbeing (Table 2).

**TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS**

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	1325	4.3%	9.4%	32.7%	29.5%	24.2%
Public discrediting of your work	1324	3.6%	6.6%	25.2%	30.3%	34.2%
Surveillance	1323	1.1%	1.0%	5.4%	11.2%	81.3%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	1323	1.1%	2.3%	8.4%	16.6%	71.5%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	1324	0.1%	0.2%	0.6%	1.5%	97.7%
Legal actions against you because of your work	1325	0.2%	0.5%	6.1%	16.0%	77.2%
Stalking	1321	0.4%	1.3%	5.2%	11.2%	81.9%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	1325	1.6%	3.8%	20.4%	29.5%	44.7%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	1325	0.6%	1.0%	5.0%	8.7%	84.8%
Other physical attacks	1320	0.2%	0.2%	2.5%	6.0%	91.1%
Coercion	1322	0.3%	0.9%	4.8%	14.1%	79.8%
Questioning of your personal morality	1324	2.9%	7.3%	29.1%	26.6%	34.1%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	1325	0.3%	1.0%	4.1%	11.7%	82.9%
Others disseminating your personal information	1325	1.0%	1.2%	10.2%	19.8%	67.8%
Workplace bullying	1325	1.7%	2.9%	11.0%	17.5%	66.9%
Abductions	1323	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.7%	99.2%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	1323	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	1.4%	98.0%
Intimidation that targets family	1323	0.2%	0.4%	4.3%	10.6%	84.5%

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	1319	24.2%	2.51	1.23
Concerned about physical well-being	1319	19.6%	2.30	1.18
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	1318	48.0%	3.13	1.33
Concerned that those who harm journalists in the United States go unpunished	1321	61.5%	3.63	1.10

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

U.S. journalists embraced the value of their work to society, expressing an obligation to educate the audience (92.8 % claimed it as very or extremely important). For many journalists, this obligation extends to counteracting disinformation (80.3 % saw it as very or extremely important). Indeed, journalists largely saw their role as surveilling society for wrongdoing by monitoring and scrutinizing those in power and shining a light on social problems. Journalists took distance, however, from more activist roles, with low support for setting the public agenda and even less support for collaborative roles, such as supporting government policy (Table 3).

**TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES**

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	1318	64.4%	3.80	1.24
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	1322	74.7%	4.05	1.24
Shine a light on society's problems	1317	72.5%	3.97	1.14
Motivate people to participate in politics	1319	27.8%	2.64	1.33
Provide analysis of current affairs	1321	59.0%	3.58	1.28
Let people express their views	1322	60.7%	3.66	1.15
Provide information people need to form political opinion	1319	58.8%	3.54	1.38
Advocate for social change	1318	18.9%	2.40	1.25
Influence public opinion	1317	14.4%	2.20	1.20
Set the political agenda	1317	5.1%	1.56	0.93
Promote peace and tolerance	1313	32.2%	2.89	1.30
Educate the audience	1322	92.8%	4.58	0.70
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	1318	54.2%	3.45	1.24
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	1319	58.9%	3.55	1.24
Support national development	1311	10.3%	1.94	1.12
Support government policy	1312	2.8%	1.44	0.83
Convey a positive image of political leaders	1322	1.2%	1.19	0.58
Provide entertainment and relaxation	1318	29.4%	2.79	1.24
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	1322	42.1%	3.21	1.20
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	1321	23.8%	2.57	1.25
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	1323	65.0%	3.80	1.07
Support efforts to protect public health	1323	54.0%	3.42	1.29
Counteract disinformation	1319	80.3%	4.24	1.08
Discuss future implications of current events	1320	67.3%	3.78	1.12

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

U.S. journalists embraced traditional notions that facts should speak for themselves (81.2%) and that it is possible to produce an objective account of reality; but at the same time, they expressed their strongest belief in calling out untruthful claims (93% agree or strongly agree) while also saying interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts (74.9%). Journalists were generally distrustful of their instincts (Table 4).

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	1321	74.9%	3.86	0.88
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	1324	32.8%	2.92	1.09
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	1324	25.4%	2.63	1.07
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	1322	19.6%	2.55	1.07
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	1316	74.2%	3.82	0.93
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	1323	26.5%	2.74	1.05
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	1314	11.5%	2.35	0.91
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	1318	81.2%	4.05	0.81
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	1323	58.3%	3.55	1.07
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	1317	26.5%	2.75	1.16
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	1321	93.0%	4.39	0.69

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 the U.S. were supportive of professional ethical standards as a guide to decision making (65.8% agree or strongly agree) and skeptical that ethics are a matter of personal judgment (Table 5). They also expressed little support for controversial reporting methods, with behaviors that compromised journalistic autonomy particularly disdained and practices that deceived the public or sources also disliked. The highest support was for using documents of the powerful without permission (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	1323	44.7%	3.23	1.22
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	1323	65.8%	3.66	1.01
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	1321	38.9%	2.94	1.23
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	1324	13.8%	2.23	1.04

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	1321	0.1%	13.3%
Using hidden recording devices	1322	1.2%	56.6%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	1317	8.9%	60.5%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	1320	5.8%	64.2%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	1318	0.1%	37.7%
Paying people for confidential information	1320	0.3%	13.1%
Accepting money from sources	1324	0.1%	0.6%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	1323	0.4%	25.0%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	1323	0.2%	5.7%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	1321	0.1%	17.7%

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

U.S. journalists reported substantial professional and editorial autonomy. Journalists mostly chose their own news stories, with even more freedom to decide on what aspects of a story to emphasize (81.1% report complete or a great deal of freedom). Freedom outside the news organization was not as strong as freedom within, with 68.7% of journalists reporting a great deal or complete media freedom in the United States (Table 7).

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	1322	77.8%	3.96	0.74
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	1321	81.1%	4.05	0.72
Media freedom in the United States	1310	68.7%	3.71	0.64

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

## EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

When journalists in the U.S. set out to make news decisions, they identified journalism ethics (81.2%) and editors (61.5%) as most influential on their work. The circumstances of news production were also perceived to play a role in news making, including time constraints, accessibility of information, and newsgathering resources. Outside pressures were reported to carry little weight, although some journalists seemed mindful of sources and audiences (Table 8).

**TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES**

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	1275	43.8%	3.28	1.05
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	1209	61.5%	3.67	1.00
The business managers of the news organization	1200	18.7%	2.20	1.26
The owners of the news organization	1193	21.9%	2.34	1.33
Editorial policy	1204	46.2%	3.20	1.25
Advertising considerations	1194	6.9%	1.68	1.00
Profit expectations	1164	12.2%	1.95	1.15
Audience research and data	1238	33.4%	2.88	1.25
Availability of news-gathering resources	1267	47.6%	3.34	1.16
Time limits	1268	56.2%	3.57	1.12
Journalism ethics	1300	81.2%	4.16	1.00
Self-censorship	1138	17.7%	2.18	1.27
Personal values and beliefs	1259	33.5%	2.90	1.30
Colleagues in other media	1265	12.6%	2.32	1.02
Friends, acquaintances and family	1234	7.9%	2.03	0.96
Feedback from the audience	1302	30.5%	2.98	1.05
Competing news organizations	1280	17.0%	2.52	1.06
Media laws and regulation	1226	37.4%	3.00	1.28
Access to information	1280	58.1%	3.60	1.10
Government censorship	1005	2.9%	1.31	0.74
Government officials	1199	10.3%	2.03	1.06
Politicians	1185	8.4%	1.89	1.03
Business people	1221	8.8%	1.95	1.01
Public relations	1245	9.7%	2.09	0.99
Relationships with news sources	1273	35.2%	2.99	1.18
Police	1146	9.9%	1.95	1.09
Issue advocacy groups	1142	5.5%	1.84	0.92
Science and health organizations	1203	30.5%	2.80	1.18
Religious groups and institutions	1140	3.5%	1.56	0.84
Military	991	3.0%	1.39	0.77
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	893	1.1%	1.10	0.46
Organized crime and criminal groups	914	1.4%	1.17	0.58
Terrorist groups	849	0.5%	1.07	0.37

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.)