

Uzbekistan

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INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan, previously a republic of the Soviet Union, declared independence in 1991. Classified as a consolidated autocratic country, it has not held free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections since gaining independence. A transition in presidential leadership was brought about by the passing of the first president, Islam Karimov. His prime minister, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, assumed the presidency in 2016. Since then, Mirziyoyev has begun to implement reforms, and improved prospects for private sector development, with emphasis on technocratic and economic goals, and opened the country to greater international cooperation.

Having been part of the Soviet Union for almost 70 years, Uzbekistan's journalistic tradition is shaped by this experience. The press was seen as an integral part of the state's propaganda efforts. Unlike Russia, Uzbekistan never went through a period of *glasnost* but continued with strict controls of journalistic output. Under President Mirziyoyev foreign media, other than Russian media which were always available, were again permitted into the country and private media was allowed to form. While it is an improvement that private media can discuss political issues to a greater extent, state media remain under government control regarding what they publish and broadcast.

The current Uzbek media landscape consists of about 75% state media and 25% private media, which this survey, carried out in June – September 2023, attempts to reflect. Deep-seated caution in expressing opinions of their own has shaped the survey responses of the Uzbek journalists.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The journalists in Uzbekistan have a larger male (68.3%) than female (31.5%) cohort. The average age is 36.3 years old (SD = 9.3; Median = 36). Uzbek journalists are well educated. 45.5% hold a Bachelor's degree and 46.6% a Master's degree. 80.4% received formal journalistic education, of these 59.0% at university, but also via apprenticeships or cadetships (52.7%). 37.9% attended short courses.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

State media are the main employers in Uzbekistan. The survey allocates 82.8% working for state media and 13.0% for private media. However, there are variations within state media, some of which work at greater arm's length from the government than others. Most of the state-owned print media are disseminated on the internet (mostly on Telegram), leading to 63% describing themselves as internet natives, and only 9.6% working for organizations that traditionally focus on newspaper publishing and 7.3% for magazine companies. 11.5% worked in a TV organization, almost 5% in radio outlets and 2% for the state news agency. Almost 70% worked in national media and 30% in regional and local media.

Working conditions are safe, with almost 80% on full-time contracts, 8% on a permanent part-time and 6.9% on a fixed term full-time contract. Only 3.3% were freelancers. For 76%, journalism was their only income and for a further 12.2% journalism provided 80% of their income.

On average, Uzbek journalists had 11.4 years' experience (SD = 7.8; Median = 10). Average working hours per week were 34.9 (SD = 7.4; Median = 35; for those in full-time employment). While 37.2% say they feel sometimes and 2.5% often stressed, 50% are rarely stressed. Of the journalists surveyed, 78.4% had no operational or strategic authority, 12% were in middle management and 9.7% in a top management role. 83.7% worked on a specific beat, while 16.3% worked across various areas. 34.9% of journalists belong to a union, 65.1% don't.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

With more than 80% of respondents working in state media, the journalists were cautious when committing to answers. Despite low pay, most journalists work fulltime and don't fear for their jobs. However, half of the journalists report having experienced surveillance and stalking (understood as a form of surveillance), and a third hateful or demeaning speech. Their strongest concern is that the state offers no protection, with those who harm journalists going unpunished.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	479	4.2%	6.3%	23.6%	20.0%	45.9%
Public discrediting of your work	479	2.7%	5.0%	13.6%	52.8%	25.9%
Surveillance	479	2.7%	8.6%	36.1%	21.3%	31.3%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	479	0.8%	9.2%	15.7%	43.6%	30.7%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	479	4.8%	6.3%	25.7%	20.3%	43.0%
Legal actions against you because of your work	479	0.8%	9.0%	17.1%	35.7%	37.4%
Stalking	479	1.9%	7.5%	29.0%	27.8%	33.8%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	479	1.7%	6.5%	17.5%	40.9%	33.4%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	479	1.0%	5.6%	20.7%	23.8%	48.9%
Other physical attacks	479	0.8%	5.2%	20.9%	37.4%	35.7%
Coercion	479	1.7%	5.2%	29.9%	27.1%	36.1%
Questioning of your personal morality	479	1.7%	8.4%	21.1%	33.0%	35.9%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	479	4.0%	6.5%	18.2%	24.8%	46.6%
Others disseminating your personal information	479	1.3%	7.7%	20.0%	34.2%	36.7%
Workplace bullying	479	0.6%	5.6%	29.0%	29.2%	35.5%
Abductions	479	1.3%	4.4%	19.8%	37.2%	37.4%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	479	1.0%	5.8%	19.2%	25.5%	48.4%
Intimidation that targets family	479	1.3%	5.2%	21.3%	36.1%	36.1%

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	479	15.0%	2.30	1.28
Concerned about physical well-being	479	11.5%	2.24	1.08
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	479	8.4%	2.16	1.06
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Uzbekistan go unpunished	479	28.0%	2.82	1.24

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

Uzbekistan's journalists prefer to stay behind the shield of being a detached observer (39%). However, they wish to educate the audience (36.1%). The Russian war against a former Soviet republic, Ukraine, and the impact of social media are likely influences on their next choices, to promote peace (33.8%) and tolerance and let people express their views (33.6%), followed by advocating for social change (33.2%) and pointing towards possible solutions to society's problems (32.6%). Least favored is setting the political agenda (18.8%), with monitoring and scrutinizing those in power also considered fairly unimportant (23.8%).

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	479	39.0%	3.20	1.43
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	479	23.8%	2.72	1.22
Shine a light on society's problems	479	28.6%	2.89	1.25
Motivate people to participate in politics	479	28.2%	2.74	1.20
Provide analysis of current affairs	479	31.7%	2.96	1.28
Let people express their views	479	33.6%	2.98	1.18
Provide information people need to form political opinion	479	27.6%	2.88	1.19
Advocate for social change	479	33.2%	2.94	1.20
Influence public opinion	479	30.7%	2.85	1.28
Set the political agenda	479	18.8%	2.57	1.11
Promote peace and tolerance	479	33.8%	3.12	1.19
Educate the audience	479	36.1%	3.05	1.20
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	479	32.6%	2.91	1.29
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	479	23.0%	2.65	1.14
Support national development	479	29.6%	3.02	1.13
Support government policy	479	28.4%	2.88	1.14
Convey a positive image of political leaders	479	19.2%	2.53	1.22
Provide entertainment and relaxation	479	23.8%	2.73	1.12
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	479	29.0%	2.95	1.11
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	479	26.3%	2.83	1.10
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	479	30.7%	2.85	1.26
Support efforts to protect public health	479	25.5%	2.75	1.14
Counteract disinformation	479	30.1%	2.98	1.14
Discuss future implications of current events	479	24.4%	2.84	1.09

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

Journalists ranked being part of the community highest (29.2%), with misinformation being their next biggest concern. Alert audiences when a claim is untruthful and things are either true or false are both at 25.3%. Their belief in representing objective reality (23.2%) is in line with Uzbek journalists seeing their main role as detached observers. Few claim to know intuitively (13.4%) or trust their instincts (13.2%).

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	479	22.8%	2.71	1.27
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	479	19.8%	2.67	1.07
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	479	20.0%	2.71	1.12
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	479	25.3%	2.82	1.10
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	479	23.2%	2.83	1.16
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	479	13.2%	2.30	1.19
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	479	13.4%	2.34	1.03
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	479	17.5%	2.47	1.14
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	479	29.2%	2.79	1.18
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	479	23.2%	2.66	1.21
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	479	25.3%	2.74	1.11

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

While the highest percentage (29.2%) was given to the importance of professional standards, an almost equal number (28.2%) allowed for the influence of extraordinary circumstances, 25.3% for specific situations and 23.6% for personal judgment. When taking all percentages into account, the figures point towards exceptionism and situationism.

Claiming to be someone else is rejected by almost half the journalists. However, the acceptance of controversial reporting methods is high. Using personal materials of powerful people was seen by 72.2% as always justified or justified on occasion, whereas using personal materials of ordinary people was only approved by 50.4%. Hidden recordings were seen by 76.2% as always justified or justified on occasions, as was paying for confidential information (68.4%). Almost two-thirds (62.8%) thought that using confidential business or government documents without authorization was always justified or justified on occasions.

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	479	29.2%	2.82	1.36
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	479	28.2%	2.94	1.17
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	479	25.3%	2.87	1.17
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	479	23.6%	2.84	1.09

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	479	21.5%	29.4%
Using hidden recording devices	479	13.6%	62.6%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	479	28.4%	34.4%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	479	14.4%	57.8%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	479	23.0%	30.1%
Paying people for confidential information	479	15.4%	53.0%
Accepting money from sources	479	21.9%	38.6%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	479	12.7%	47.0%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	479	22.3%	39.9%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	479	17.5%	46.6%

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

The figures are an apposite reflection of being journalists in a country classified as 'consolidated autocratic'. Only a fifth (20.5%) claim to have complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding which story elements to emphasize and 18.4% in which stories to select. Media freedom is rated a low 15.7%.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	479	18.4%	3.13	0.65
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	479	20.5%	3.16	0.69
Media freedom in Uzbekistan	478	15.7%	2.91	0.72

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

External influences were rated higher than internal ones. Media laws and regulation ranked highest (35.3%), followed by access to information (33.8%) and relationships with news sources (32%). Of the internal influences, journalism ethics (31.8%) ranked just above newsgathering resources (29.8%). Equal third were editorial policy and self-censorship (both 28.3%).

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	465	20.4%	2.62	1.25
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	472	27.3%	2.83	1.11
The business managers of the news organization	470	20.0%	2.53	1.22
The owners of the news organization	472	21.8%	2.63	1.13
Editorial policy	470	28.3%	2.85	1.21
Advertising considerations	464	19.2%	2.49	1.10
Profit expectations	460	18.0%	2.46	1.13
Audience research and data	464	18.5%	2.47	1.11
Availability of news-gathering resources	470	29.8%	2.81	1.21
Time limits	469	21.3%	2.68	1.09
Journalism ethics	471	31.8%	2.93	1.19
Self-censorship	473	28.3%	2.85	1.14
Personal values and beliefs	474	23.8%	2.78	1.20
Colleagues in other media	464	15.5%	2.41	1.16
Friends, acquaintances and family	470	20.4%	2.63	0.98
Feedback from the audience	474	22.6%	2.73	1.17
Competing news organizations	475	22.7%	2.69	1.04
Media laws and regulation	476	35.3%	3.05	1.20
Access to information	468	33.8%	2.98	1.09
Government censorship	470	17.7%	2.72	1.05
Government officials	472	16.9%	2.61	1.02
Politicians	475	20.8%	2.69	1.12
Business people	470	16.6%	2.48	1.02
Public relations	476	30.7%	2.95	1.14
Relationships with news sources	472	32.0%	2.85	1.14
Police	447	10.3%	2.26	1.06
Issue advocacy groups	448	11.6%	2.31	1.01
Scientists or health experts	445	10.1%	2.18	1.03
Religious groups and institutions	447	11.9%	2.18	1.12
Military	441	11.2%	2.21	1.05
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	438	10.9%	2.21	1.06
Organized crime and criminal groups	440	10.0%	2.21	1.06
Terrorist groups	447	11.4%	2.36	1.06

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.)