

# Venezuela

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## INTRODUCTION

As of 2025, Venezuela remains trapped in a profound socio-political and economic crisis. President Nicolás Maduro started his third term despite a widely disputed election due to allegations of electoral fraud. Economically, the nation continued its catastrophic downturn, which further aggravated the humanitarian situation with large portions of the population facing food and medicine shortages.

The current journalistic landscape has undergone significant transformations, too. Historically, Venezuelan journalism offered a vibrant press environment, but political shifts initiated during Hugo Chávez's presidency and intensified under Nicolás Maduro have altered this scenario. Since the 2010s, numerous outlets have shut down due to censorship, repression or financial troubles. Press freedom continuously deteriorated, with abundant reports of press freedom violations in the country.

The fieldwork of this study took place between late 2021 and early 2023 in the aftermath of the 2020 standoff between Juan Guaidó, who was acknowledged as interim president by several Western countries, and Nicolás Maduro, who remained de-facto president. At the time of data collection, Venezuela was still battling the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, during the last months of this period, Venezuela experienced a light economic and socio-political recovery.

## BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Our sample of Venezuelan journalists is balanced in terms of gender: 53.0% in the sample were women. On average, they were 44.4 years old ( $SD = 12.9$ ; Median = 43). They are generally well educated: 63.7% of them held a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, 32.5% a Master's degree or equivalent, and an additional 2.0% have obtained a doctorate. Moreover, 97.2% of the respondents have acquired formal education or professional training in journalism. This education or training is usually obtained at university or in college (96.4%) but also via apprenticeships or cadetships (94.3%) and short-term courses (84.2%).

## JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

More than one third of journalists in Venezuela (35.8%) worked for native online media, 20.4% for organizations traditionally focused on newspaper publishing, 12.9% for radio outlets, and 6.4% for television news agencies, respectively. Very few journalists worked for magazine companies and in the telecommunications sector (0.5%, respectively). Finally, 15.5% of the interviewed journalists claimed not to have a main employer. Regarding area of coverage, 64.2% of the journalists reported they mainly worked for (trans)national media, while 35.0% primarily catered to local or regional media.

On average, Venezuelan journalists had 17.6 years of professional experience ( $SD = 11.2$ ; Median = 15). A majority of them (79.1%) worked on a variety of beats or subject areas rather than on a single one. More than two thirds of Venezuelan journalists (68.8%) were members of professional associations.

About half of the interviewed journalists in Venezuela had a full-time contract (43.7% permanently and 6.3% temporarily employed). Almost a third (30.6%) worked as freelancers or were self-employed, and an additional 8.6% had other forms of employment. Finally, 6.6% had a part-time permanent contract, and 4.3% had a part-time temporary contract. These results suggest a precarious employment situation, as does the fact that 48.5% of the respondents reported that they had additional jobs outside journalism.

The average working week of Venezuelan full-time journalists was 44.7 hours ( $SD = 20.9$ ; Median = 45). Relatedly, 55.2% of the respondents reported they felt stressed out at work often or very often during the previous six months; only 18.1% had never or rarely felt that way.

**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 Venezuelan journalists (see Table 1). However, despite experienced less frequently, experiences of more dangerous threats, such as legal actions or physical threats, are worrying. These experiences also impact the concerns expressed by Venezuelan journalists; more than half were concerned about losing their job, and a broad majority were concerned about their physical or emotional well-being (see Table 2). Moreover, almost all of the surveyed journalists feared that those who harm journalists would go unpunished.

**TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS**

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	398	5.0%	14.3%	43.5%	18.6%	18.6%
Public discrediting of your work	398	4.0%	11.6%	30.7%	19.6%	34.2%
Surveillance	398	4.5%	12.3%	27.9%	15.3%	39.9%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	398	7.0%	10.8%	22.4%	15.8%	44.0%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	398	1.0%	0.3%	7.5%	4.3%	86.9%
Legal actions against you because of your work	398	1.0%	2.3%	8.8%	8.0%	79.9%
Stalking	398	3.8%	4.0%	22.6%	16.6%	53.0%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	398	3.8%	6.8%	27.9%	19.3%	42.2%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	398	0.3%	0.5%	3.3%	6.8%	89.2%
Other physical attacks	398	0.3%	2.0%	12.8%	13.1%	71.9%
Coercion	398	1.8%	3.3%	13.6%	22.6%	58.8%
Questioning of your personal morality	398	2.5%	7.3%	20.1%	19.8%	50.3%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	398	1.0%	2.0%	7.8%	11.1%	78.1%
Others disseminating your personal information	398	1.5%	3.0%	10.8%	11.1%	73.6%
Workplace bullying	398	0.8%	1.8%	11.6%	11.8%	74.1%
Abductions	398	0.3%	0.0%	1.5%	1.3%	97.0%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	398	0.3%	0.8%	8.0%	9.5%	81.4%
Intimidation that targets family	398	0.5%	1.3%	5.3%	6.0%	86.9%

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	398	54.3%	3.36	1.40
Concerned about physical well-being	398	64.3%	3.54	1.24
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	398	79.1%	3.97	1.13
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Venezuela go unpunished	398	95.2%	4.61	0.76

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**

Venezuelan journalists showed strong support for interventionist roles, while more traditional approaches remain relevant but less appreciated (see Table 3). Politically assertive roles were among the least valued ones. Even in those cases, significant portions (around a quarter or more) of the interviewed journalists considered these roles extremely or very important.

**TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES**

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	398	80.9%	4.11	0.93
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	398	78.1%	4.08	1.02
Shine a light on society's problems	398	92.0%	4.53	0.72
Motivate people to participate in politics	398	31.4%	2.91	1.19
Provide analysis of current affairs	398	83.4%	4.24	0.87
Let people express their views	398	87.4%	4.31	0.82
Provide information people need to form political opinion	398	76.4%	4.08	1.02
Advocate for social change	398	77.4%	4.08	0.93
Influence public opinion	398	65.3%	3.71	1.04
Set the political agenda	398	23.1%	2.64	1.16
Promote peace and tolerance	398	85.4%	4.32	0.93
Educate the audience	398	92.7%	4.53	0.72
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	398	83.4%	4.21	0.88
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	398	87.2%	4.38	0.89
Support national development	398	81.4%	4.18	0.90
Support government policy	398	34.2%	3.10	1.08
Convey a positive image of political leaders	398	32.4%	2.81	1.30
Provide entertainment and relaxation	398	40.7%	3.18	1.18
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	398	74.6%	3.99	0.95
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	398	61.8%	3.68	1.05
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	398	75.4%	4.06	0.92
Discuss future implications of current events	398	72.9%	3.94	0.97
Support efforts to protect public health	398	79.4%	4.14	0.96
Counteract disinformation	398	93.2%	4.61	0.74
Discuss future implications of current events	398	72.9%	3.94	0.97

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

There was greater disagreement among Venezuelan journalists regarding their perceptions of journalistic epistemology (see Table 4). Respondents agreed on the importance of letting the facts speak for themselves, alerting audiences about untrue claims, and valuing interpretation to make sense of facts.

**TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES**

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	398	74.9%	3.81	1.04
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	398	13.1%	2.17	1.04
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	398	39.2%	3.04	1.13
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	398	47.0%	3.15	1.36
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	398	64.6%	3.62	1.04
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	398	28.6%	2.71	1.12
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	398	25.9%	2.73	1.09
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	398	76.6%	3.89	0.93
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	398	26.4%	2.69	1.15
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	398	58.0%	3.46	1.20
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	398	72.6%	3.84	0.99

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 Venezuela strongly agreed on the importance of professional standards rather than subjective and situational considerations for ethical reporting (see Table 5). When it comes to the justification of controversial reporting methods, however, accepting money from sources and publishing unverified information was most strongly rejected (see Table 7). Most journalists found it acceptable to use hidden recording devices and use confidential documents without authorization.

**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	81.9%	4.15	1.01
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	398	31.7%	2.70	1.24
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	398	17.6%	2.24	1.18
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	398	20.4%	2.28	1.20

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	398	2.5%	29.4%
Using hidden recording devices	398	5.0%	64.3%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	398	6.8%	56.0%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	398	3.5%	47.2%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	398	1.5%	22.1%
Paying people for confidential information	398	1.0%	26.1%
Accepting money from sources	398	0.3%	3.5%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	398	4.8%	29.6%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	398	1.8%	15.6%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	398	1.0%	4.8%

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

Venezuelan journalists reported a limited but fair amount of freedom in their work (see Table 7). About two thirds claimed to have complete or a great deal of freedom in selecting their stories and in deciding which aspects to emphasize in a story. Media freedom was rated extremely low by the respondents.

**TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF FREEDOM**

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	398	66.1%	3.81	0.90
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	398	62.8%	3.73	0.93
Media freedom in Venezuela	398	2.5%	2.23	0.66

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

## EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Venezuelan journalists found journalism ethics and editorial policy to fare highest among the internal factors influencing news production (see Table 8). Among the external factors, most journalists considered access to information, government censorship, and media laws and regulation as being extremely or very influential.

**TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES**

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	371	24.5%	2.73	1.07
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	383	54.3%	3.45	1.04
The business managers of the news organization	382	38.0%	3.02	1.24
The owners of the news organization	373	48.3%	3.26	1.31
Editorial policy	379	62.0%	3.62	1.11
Advertising considerations	373	22.0%	2.40	1.20
Profit expectations	376	27.1%	2.70	1.22
Audience research and data	377	39.3%	3.07	1.16
Availability of news-gathering resources	390	42.6%	3.52	1.10
Time limits	390	44.4%	3.26	1.15
Journalism ethics	393	86.3%	4.21	0.84
Self-censorship	387	36.4%	3.00	1.23
Personal values and beliefs	384	54.2%	3.49	1.21
Colleagues in other media	379	7.4%	2.18	0.93
Friends, acquaintances and family	379	11.6%	2.26	1.01
Feedback from the audience	390	54.6%	3.46	0.97
Competing news organizations	380	19.5%	2.56	1.06
Media laws and regulation	387	53.5%	3.53	1.08
Access to information	387	73.6%	3.98	0.98
Government censorship	387	65.6%	3.76	1.14
Government officials	382	47.4%	3.31	1.20
Politicians	386	32.9%	2.89	1.23
Business people	379	16.1%	2.39	1.06
Public relations	383	24.5%	2.66	1.14
Relationships with news sources	390	49.5%	3.38	1.08
Police	374	23.8%	2.55	1.23
Issue advocacy groups	382	22.3%	2.61	1.13
Religious groups and institutions	376	12.2%	2.26	1.04
Military	379	26.1%	2.59	1.31
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	361	21.6%	2.39	1.29
Organized crime and criminal groups	363	24.8%	2.45	1.34
Terrorist groups	334	16.2%	2.02	1.30

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.)