

# Yemen<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

As of 2025, Yemen remains mired in a complex political, economic, and social crisis, stemming from a war that has persisted for over a decade. The country is divided between two rival authorities in Sana'a and Aden, resulting in institutional fragmentation and the absence of a unified state apparatus. On the economic front, the Yemeni riyal has experienced continued depreciation, while poverty, unemployment, and hunger have worsened. Most households suffer from food insecurity, deepening the population's suffering, contributing to the erosion of social cohesion, the rise in displacement, and a marked decline in the quality of education and public services.

Nevertheless, Yemen has a longstanding journalistic tradition that dates back to the early 20th century, during which newspapers played a pivotal role in the national liberation movement and in resisting colonialism. The country witnessed a period of relative media freedom following the reunification of North and South Yemen on 22 May 1990. However, this phase did not last long, as press freedom deteriorated. The majority of print newspapers and websites ceased operations due to financial constraints, state dominance, the lack of constitutional and legal protections, and the looting of media offices by armed groups. Presently, active digital outlets (online news websites) and newspapers face mounting political, security, and financial restrictions. The current media landscape in Yemen is both complex and perilous, where journalists face threats and targeting from multiple parties to the conflict.

The field study was conducted between late 2021 and early 2023, coinciding with a ruling by the State Security Court in Sana'a that sentenced four journalists detained by Ansar Allah to death – an incident that provoked widespread international condemnation. These journalists were later released as part of a prisoner exchange in early 2023, an event that underscored the fragility of press freedom in Yemen.

## BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The sample of Yemeni journalists surveyed was unbalanced in terms of gender, with 81.3% male and only 18.7% female respondents. The average age of participants was approximately 38.3 years (SD = 7.5; Median = 38). In terms of educational attainment, the vast majority held higher education degrees: 79.9% possessed a bachelor's degree or equivalent, 11.0% held a master's degree or equivalent, and 0.7% had earned a doctoral degree. Furthermore, 88.0% of respondents reported having received formal education or professional training in journalism. This training was typically acquired through university or college (87.1%), field-based professional training or apprenticeships (78.7%), and short-term courses (43.0%).

## JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

The study revealed that more than one-third of journalists in Yemen (34.9%) are employed by emerging local media initiatives. In terms of the background of their main employers, 28.8% work for television channels, 13.5% for newspapers, 9.6% for radio stations, and 9.3% for news agencies. Very few are employed in magazines and telecommunications, representing only 0.7% and 0.4% respectively. Additionally, 2.8% of respondents indicated that they do not have a primary employer. Regarding the scope of media coverage, 62.0% reported working primarily for national or transnational media outlets, while 38.0% were engaged predominantly in local or regional media.

On average, Yemeni journalists possess 12.6 years of professional experience (SD = 6.6; Median = 12). Only 13.1% work in a single field of journalistic coverage. Approximately 46.4% of the journalists are union members.

Roughly one-fifth of journalists interviewed reported having full-time employment contracts (12.1% with permanent contracts and 7.3% with temporary contracts). Around half (48.0%) work part-time under temporary contracts, 19.8% are freelancers or self-employed, 12.1% are part-time permanent employees, and 0.7% reported other forms of employment. These findings point to a largely precarious employment situation. Notably, 66.7% of participants indicated they earn additional income from work outside journalism.

The average weekly working hours for Yemeni full-time journalists is 39.6 (SD = 17.3; Median = 36). Relatedly, 29.9% of respondents reported experiencing occasional stress at work during the past six months, while 26.4% reported experiencing severe stress, and 6.3% did not report any stress.

<sup>1</sup> Country sample does not fully align with WJS specifications regarding maximum margin of error (see WJS3 Methodology).

## SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Verbal attacks – such as insults, hate speech, public defamation, and surveillance – are among the most common security threats faced by journalists in Yemen (see Table 1). While more severe threats, such as legal actions, physical assaults, stalking, and hacking or banning of social media accounts and websites, occur less frequently, they nonetheless remain a major source of concern. These experiences are reflected in journalists' expressed anxieties. A significant majority voiced concern about the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of violence against them. Most were also worried about losing their jobs (see Table 2). Furthermore, more than half of the journalists surveyed expressed concern for their physical safety and mental well-being.

**TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS**

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	283	23.0%	26.9%	29.3%	12.4%	8.5%
Public discrediting of your work	283	14.5%	18.0%	27.2%	22.3%	18.0%
Surveillance	283	23.7%	30.0%	24.0%	13.4%	8.8%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	283	7.1%	7.4%	24.0%	24.4%	37.1%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	283	2.1%	7.8%	18.7%	26.9%	44.5%
Legal actions against you because of your work	283	4.6%	6.7%	13.8%	28.6%	46.3%
Stalking	283	3.5%	6.7%	18.0%	27.6%	44.2%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	283	5.3%	8.5%	15.5%	28.3%	42.4%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	283	1.4%	4.9%	13.8%	24.4%	55.5%
Other physical attacks	283	2.1%	4.9%	13.1%	32.2%	47.7%
Coercion	283	2.1%	5.7%	16.3%	29.0%	47.0%
Questioning of your personal morality	283	2.1%	7.8%	15.9%	24.0%	50.2%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	283	0.7%	5.3%	15.9%	27.2%	50.9%
Others disseminating your personal information	283	2.8%	4.2%	14.1%	29.0%	49.8%
Workplace bullying	283	0.7%	7.1%	16.6%	34.6%	41.0%
Abductions	283	1.8%	4.6%	13.4%	26.5%	53.7%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	283	1.4%	4.2%	13.1%	25.1%	56.2%
Intimidation that targets family	283	2.5%	4.2%	12.7%	28.3%	52.3%

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	283	84.8%	4.23	0.90
Concerned about physical well-being	283	77.0%	4.09	0.98
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	283	79.2%	4.10	0.92
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Yemen go unpunished	283	86.6%	4.39	0.81

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

Yemeni journalists showed strong support for watchdog roles, while traditional reporting practices remain relevant, though less valued (see Table 3). The role of promoting a positive image of political leaders ranked among the least valued. Nonetheless, a significant number (more than half) considered these roles either very important or extremely important.

**TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES**

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	283	94.3%	4.45	0.60
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	283	87.3%	4.35	0.77
Shine a light on society's problems	283	83.0%	4.23	0.73
Motivate people to participate in politics	283	71.7%	3.98	1.00
Provide analysis of current affairs	283	74.2%	4.02	0.92
Let people express their views	283	70.0%	4.00	0.89
Provide information people need to form political opinion	283	72.4%	3.98	0.95
Advocate for social change	283	76.3%	4.10	0.91
Influence public opinion	283	73.1%	4.01	0.90
Set the political agenda	283	61.5%	3.76	0.98
Promote peace and tolerance	283	74.6%	4.06	0.85
Educate the audience	283	76.7%	4.15	0.87
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	283	70.7%	4.03	0.89
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	283	68.9%	3.95	0.99
Support national development	283	74.9%	4.04	0.85
Support government policy	283	52.3%	3.53	1.09
Convey a positive image of political leaders	283	47.0%	3.33	1.21
Provide entertainment and relaxation	283	62.9%	3.73	1.03
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	283	60.4%	3.77	1.00
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	283	74.6%	3.99	0.88
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	283	65.0%	3.85	0.92
Support efforts to protect public health	283	73.1%	3.98	0.91
Counteract disinformation	283	70.3%	3.93	0.87
Discuss future implications of current events	283	66.1%	3.84	0.95

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 is a considerable degree of variation among Yemeni journalists concerning their perceptions of journalistic knowledge (see Table 4). However, respondents largely agreed on the importance of interpretation in understanding facts. They also shared the view that truth is inherently shaped by those in power, and that things are either right or wrong, with no middle ground. Objectively representing reality in journalistic coverage was also deemed essential.

**TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES**

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	283	97.2%	4.47	0.55
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	283	79.2%	4.12	0.86
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	283	71.0%	3.87	0.90
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	283	79.2%	4.00	0.85
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	283	79.2%	4.07	0.75
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	283	14.8%	3.13	0.67
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	282	20.9%	3.26	0.59
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	281	22.4%	3.32	0.70
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	280	24.3%	3.36	0.71
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	280	20.0%	3.26	0.66
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	280	23.2%	3.32	0.66

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

Most journalists in Yemen emphasized the importance of personal and situational considerations over professional standards in ethical coverage. However, more than half supported the prioritization of professional standards over personal considerations (see Table 5). When it comes to justifying controversial methods in reporting, accepting money from sources and producing content that mimics news stories while concealing their promotional nature were strongly rejected (see Table 6). In contrast, most journalists found it acceptable to use hidden recording devices and confidential documents without permission.

**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	283	69.6%	3.98	0.77
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	283	25.4%	3.04	1.00
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	282	44.0%	3.01	1.42
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	283	77.7%	4.01	0.96

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	283	0.4%	10.6%
Using hidden recording devices	283	2.5%	59.4%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	283	2.5%	48.1%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	283	1.1%	27.9%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	283	0.7%	13.4%
Paying people for confidential information	283	4.2%	20.1%
Accepting money from sources	283		
Accepting a free product or service from sources	283	0.4%	15.2%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	283	3.2%	20.8%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	283	2.8%	24.4%

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

Yemeni journalists reported having limited freedom in their work (see Table 7). Around two-thirds stated they had considerable freedom in determining which aspects of a story to focus on and in selecting the stories they cover. Nonetheless, respondents rated overall media freedom very poorly.

**TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM**

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	283	14.1%	2.25	1.12
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	283	16.3%	2.68	1.13
Media freedom in Yemen	273	2.6%	1.64	0.80

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

## EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Respondents identified editorial supervisors, senior editors, and colleagues in the newsroom as the most influential internal factors in news production (see Table 8). Externally, friends, acquaintances, family members, audience reactions, and peers in other media outlets were deemed the most influential.

**TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES**

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	280	83.6%	4.16	0.86
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	280	85.4%	4.24	0.78
The business managers of the news organization	279	70.3%	3.92	0.85
The owners of the news organization	279	80.6%	4.19	0.84
Editorial policy	281	76.5%	4.05	0.80
Advertising considerations	271	57.9%	3.64	0.91
Profit expectations	271	54.6%	3.57	0.97
Audience research and data	272	66.2%	3.80	0.94
Availability of news-gathering resources	282	66.0%	3.86	0.93
Time limits	280	68.9%	3.84	0.89
Journalism ethics	280	61.4%	3.79	0.93
Self-censorship	282	63.5%	3.82	0.94
Personal values and beliefs	282	63.1%	3.85	1.01
Colleagues in other media	282	79.4%	4.16	0.98
Friends, acquaintances and family	282	83.0%	4.10	0.98
Feedback from the audience	282	79.8%	4.00	0.79
Competing news organizations	280	65.7%	3.74	0.88
Media laws and regulation	283	62.9%	3.85	0.86
Access to information	283	70.3%	3.99	0.82
Government censorship	281	70.1%	3.95	0.84
Government officials	283	67.1%	3.81	0.93
Politicians	283	56.9%	3.65	0.99
Business people	280	55.4%	3.60	0.93
Public relations	282	57.4%	3.68	0.98
Relationships with news sources	282	67.3%	3.81	0.82
Police	279	63.4%	3.75	1.01
Issue advocacy groups	277	62.8%	3.75	0.94
Religious groups and institutions	280	62.5%	3.73	0.94
Military	279	58.4%	3.72	0.96
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	278	61.2%	3.74	1.02
Organized crime and criminal groups	274	58.8%	3.69	0.93
Terrorist groups	273	54.9%	3.61	0.95
Scientists or health experts	282	67.0%	3.84	0.91

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.)