

Zambia

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INTRODUCTION

Zambia has had shifting governments since the arrival of multiparty democracy in 1991 and is viewed as a stabilizing country in Southern Africa. The country's economy is largely built on export of minerals, in particular copper which stands for 70% of the foreign trade. Around 60% of the 20-million population live below the poverty line, earning less than USD 2.15 per day.

Zambia has a diverse media landscape with many private broadcasters and print outlets besides the state-owned media company. The press freedom situation has improved since 2021 when the current government came to power. As of 2025, Zambia is listed as number 82 of 180 countries on Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index, which is the best score for the country since 2013.

The Worlds of Journalism Study data collection for Zambia was undertaken in 2022, when there were various positive prospects for the media. Lack of access to government officials has been a challenge for Zambian news reporters, but in 2023, the country got its first Access to Information Act. The common perception is that press freedom rights and human rights have gained ground in the country in the past few years.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Zambian journalists are young, with an average age of 32.7 years in the sample ($SD = 7.7$; Median = 32). The profession is male-dominated which is reflected in the sample by the finding that 57.8% of the total 294 respondents were men. In terms of education, about one-third (31.8%) said that they had completed high school and another third (37.7%) had a bachelor's degree. A fairly high proportion, 26.7%, had some university studies, but no degree. Only 2.7% possessed a master's degree. As many as 89.5% had professional training in journalism, which could have been obtained through short-term training (81.3%), apprenticeship (76.0%), and/or in a university programme (36.6%).

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In terms of media ownership, 61.2% of the respondents worked for the private media, 15.0% for the state-owned media, and 21.8% for community media. Around half, 47.6%, worked for media channels with local reach, while 10.5% worked for regional media and 38.8% for national media outlets.

In terms of the background of their main employers, most of the respondents came from radio (62.6%), which is generally regarded as still the most important media platform in Zambia. The remaining proportion worked primarily for television (23.5%), newspaper (11.2%) or magazine/internet/news agency (2.7%).

The average experience was 7.2 years ($SD = 4.8$; Median = 6). Around half (47.3%) were members of a professional association. In terms of work arrangements, 79.8% had a full-time position (61.0% on a permanent contract, 18.8% fixed term). Only 1.0% of the sample (three respondents) were freelancers. Every fifth journalist (21.1%) had income from other sources than journalism. The typical working week for full-time journalists was 44.8 hours ($SD = 19.1$; Median = 45).

Many Zambian journalists reported that they were stressed out as a result of their work. As many as 38.6% had experienced stress very often in the last six months, 15.7% often, and 29.4% sometimes.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Zambian journalists experience a range of threats in their work. Most commonly reported is hate speech, which more than 60% had experienced at least sometimes in the past five years (Table 1). The feeling of being surveilled (44.0%) and hacked (20.4%) was quite common too. Sexual assault is something 14.0% of the journalists said they had experienced, but it was reported 13 times more often by female than by male journalists. Furthermore, Zambian journalists seemed to doubt that their profession is well protected, as nearly 90% feared that crimes against journalists in the country would not be persecuted (Table 2).

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	293	15.4 %	14.0 %	31.4 %	14.0 %	25.3 %
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	294	14.3 %	12.9 %	20.7 %	10.2 %	41.8 %
Public discrediting of your work	293	12.3 %	9.6 %	24.9 %	13.3 %	39.9 %
Surveillance	293	9.9 %	14.3 %	19.8 %	13.3 %	42.7 %
Stalking	291	6.9 %	6.2 %	17.9 %	10.0 %	59.1 %
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	294	6.8 %	3.7 %	9.9 %	11.2 %	68.4 %
Questioning of your personal morality	294	4.4 %	5.4 %	18.4 %	13.9 %	57.8 %
Workplace bullying	294	4.1 %	2.7 %	13.3 %	9.9 %	70.1 %
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	293	3.8 %	3.4 %	14.7 %	11.3 %	66.9 %
Others disseminating your personal information	293	3.8 %	5.5 %	16.0 %	10.2 %	64.5 %
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	294	3.4 %	2.7 %	5.1 %	7.1 %	81.6 %
Legal actions against you because of your work	294	3.4 %	1.7 %	7.5 %	6.1 %	81.3 %
Coercion	289	2.8 %	2.4 %	17.6 %	8.3 %	68.9 %
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	294	2.4 %	1.7 %	14.3 %	9.2 %	72.4 %
Other physical attacks	293	2.0 %	3.1 %	11.6 %	13.3 %	70.0 %
Intimidation that targets family	293	2.0 %	1.7 %	7.5 %	7.5 %	81.2 %
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	291	1.7 %	3.4 %	8.9 %	5.2 %	80.8 %
Abductions	292	0.3 %	0.3 %	1.0 %	2.4 %	95.9 %

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
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Zambia go unpunished	294	86.7%	4.29	1.14
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	294	60.5%	3.41	1.47
Concerned about physical well-being	293	54.6%	3.25	1.48
Worried about losing job in journalism within the next 12 months	293	26.6%	2.48	1.40

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

Zambian journalists express strong role commitments in different directions. The interventionist role comes out as solid (including indicators such as advocating for social change), but so do the monitorial (e.g. monitoring those in power) and the accommodative roles (audience-oriented journalism). The collaborative role, i.e. being loyal to the political leadership, comes out as relatively less pronounced (Table 3).

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Let people express their views	294	95.9%	4.57	0.65
Educate the audience	294	95.9%	4.57	0.61
Provide analysis of current affairs	292	94.5%	4.42	0.73
Advocate for social change	294	94.2%	4.40	0.66
Promote peace and tolerance	294	93.9%	4.49	0.73
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	293	92.8%	4.44	0.74
Shine a light on society's problems	294	91.8%	4.41	0.74
Support national development	293	91.5%	4.40	0.71
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	294	91.2%	4.35	0.81
Support efforts to protect public health	292	90.8%	4.32	0.81
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	293	89.4%	4.31	0.84
Discuss future implications of current events	293	89.4%	4.31	0.84
Provide information people need to form political opinion	291	86.9%	4.25	0.95
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	293	84.0%	4.18	0.96
Influence public opinion	293	77.1%	3.92	1.15
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	294	74.8%	3.95	0.93
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	294	73.8%	3.98	1.00
Provide entertainment and relaxation	293	73.0%	3.86	1.04
Motivate people to participate in politics	292	71.9%	3.75	1.25
Support government policy	293	69.3%	3.82	1.07
Be a detached observer	294	59.9%	3.49	1.34
Counteract disinformation	294	59.9%	3.49	1.34
Set the political agenda	290	57.6%	3.38	1.41
Convey a positive image of political leaders	291	37.8%	2.76	1.45

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

Zambian journalists’ responses to various epistemological claims could appear as somewhat inconsistent. For example, most of them believe that it is possible to report objectively, but at the same time they emphasize that interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts (Table 4). The overall tendency, nevertheless, is leaning towards an objective view of reality.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	290	96.6%	4.45	0.65
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	290	95.9%	4.50	0.73
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	289	91.3%	4.22	0.91
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	287	90.2%	4.22	0.77
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	289	81.0%	4.08	1.04
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	288	77.8%	3.94	1.18
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	290	72.8%	3.83	1.15
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	291	69.8%	3.57	1.28
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	291	58.4%	3.28	1.39
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	290	44.8%	2.97	1.38
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	290	38.3%	2.87	1.28

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

Zambian journalists strongly support absolutist ethics, which is the standpoint that ethical rules should prevail over personal preferences and situational considerations. Very few believe that it should be up to individual journalists to decide what is right and wrong (Table 5). When asked about specific ethical cases, many journalists were open to using hidden recording devices on occasion. A significant proportion, around 40%, justified that they can receive free products and money from sources (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	293	90.1%	4.31	0.91
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	294	78.6%	3.84	1.09
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	292	45.5%	2.99	1.32
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	292	25.7%	2.42	1.22

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
Using hidden recording devices	292	3.8%	62.0%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	290	5.5%	44.8%
Accepting money from sources	291	2.7%	36.1%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	292	2.1%	31.5%
Claiming to be somebody else	292	2.1%	29.5%
Paying people for confidential information	292	2.4%	29.1%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	292	4.1%	26.4%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	290	1.0%	25.5%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	291	1.4%	18.9%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	285	0.4%	12.6%

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

Journalists reported rather high internal freedom in the newsroom, with two-thirds saying that they were free to select their own stories and to decide which aspects to focus on. Media freedom in the country was rated lower, but still, around 20% claimed that there is complete or a great deal of press freedom in Zambia.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	294	62.2%	3.88	1.11
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	294	65.0%	3.87	1.12
Media freedom in Zambia	292	19.5%	2.94	0.94

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Journalists asserted that formal guidelines such as media laws, regulation, editorial policy and professional ethics have the highest influence on their practice (Table 8). As many as 70.1% said that self-censorship is extremely or very influential. External players such as government officials, politicians and business people were rated as having far less influence. It is worth noting that journalists saw criminal networks, terrorists and the like as having little impact on newsroom decisions.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Media laws and regulation	269	82.2 %	4.12	1.01
Journalism ethics	289	81.3 %	4.18	1.02
Editorial policy	291	78.4 %	4.00	1.13
Feedback from the audience	270	75.9 %	3.96	1.12
Time limits	282	73.0 %	3.93	1.12
Self-censorship	288	70.1 %	3.84	1.17
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	289	68.5 %	3.74	1.26
Availability of news-gathering resources	282	68.4 %	3.73	1.26
Access to information	265	68.3 %	3.78	1.29
Personal values and beliefs	289	66.4 %	3.68	1.32
Competing news organizations	266	65.0 %	3.59	1.35
Audience research and data	273	63.7 %	3.62	1.28
Relationships with news sources	264	62.1 %	3.57	1.31
Issue advocacy groups	261	57.5 %	3.43	1.36
The owners of the news organization	287	56.1 %	3.39	1.48
Public relations	264	55.3 %	3.42	1.28
Profit expectations	278	54.7 %	3.33	1.41
Advertising considerations	284	53.5 %	3.30	1.40
Government censorship	264	53.4 %	3.44	1.30
Religious groups and institutions	264	53.0 %	3.32	1.38
Scientists or health experts	259	52.9 %	3.31	1.33
The business managers of the news organization	282	52.8 %	3.23	1.42
Government officials	264	47.0 %	3.27	1.38
Peers on the news staff	291	46.4 %	3.16	1.25
Business people	257	45.5 %	3.18	1.41
Politicians	262	41.2 %	3.06	1.42
Police	250	40.8 %	2.93	1.46
Colleagues in other media	268	40.7 %	2.99	1.32
Friends, acquaintances and family	268	37.7 %	2.72	1.44
Military	191	19.4 %	2.15	1.39
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	180	19.4 %	1.98	1.39
Organized crime and criminal groups	173	17.8 %	1.87	1.28
Terrorist groups	124	3.2 %	1.23	0.76

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.)