

## Country Report

# Journalists in Bangladesh

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## Background of Journalists

The average portfolio of a Bangladeshi journalist is a young male Bangalee Muslim (89.1%) in their mid-thirties holding a college/university degree. Women's participation in this craft is still disappointingly low, making up only 10.9 percent of the total number of professional journalists. On average, Bangladeshi journalists are 36.67 years old ( $s=10.05$ ); the median age is 35, indicating the recent entry of a large number of young people in this vocation. Nearly all of these journalists (99.4%) describe Bangalee as their ethnic identity and 79.4 percent are Muslims.

Though the country is fighting to provide quality education in this area, journalists in Bangladesh come to the profession with a strong educational background. Of the 352 respondents in this survey, 86.8 percent hold college or university degree; and 43.7 percent of them specialized either in journalism or another communication field. The respondents consist of 23.9 percent senior news professionals (news editor, Bureau chief, chief reporter), 52.2 percent mid-career level (Staff reporter, Copy editor/Sub-editor) and 23.6 percent are junior staff. Among these professionals, 86.4 percent work in private media and 11.1 percent work in the state-run media.

## Journalists in the Newsroom

The employment contracts for the working journalists include full time (83.2%), followed by part time (13.6%) and freelancers (2.6%). Out of the 352 journalists interviewed, 60.5 percent are permanent staff and 39.5 percent hold temporary positions in media outlets. 65.5 percent of the journalists are associated with unions (either with Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists or local/regional journalists' unions).

Bangladeshi journalists had, on average, worked as journalists for 11.56 years ( $s=8.72$ ), and about half of them had nine years of professional experience or more. Whether temporary or permanent, full time or part time, most of them (76.3%) work for one newsroom. But they are often involved with more than one news outlet – 17.1 percent work for two newsrooms and 10.4 percent of the journalists work for three media outlets at the same time. Nearly all of them (88.1%) are not involved with any other form of paid work outside of journalism.

Irrespective of their employment agreements or workloads in the media, the majority of the journalists does not have a specific work area. 83.9 percent out of them work on various topics and subjects; their central areas are: news and current affairs (36.5%), politics (10.8%), economy (10.8%), and crime and law (8.1%). Only a few journalists (15.4%) work on a specific beat/topic.

The majority of Bangladeshi journalists in the sample work for print media: 53.1 percent contribute to dailies, 5.4 percent to weeklies and 3.7 percent to magazines.

Across other forms of media, 16.2 percent work in television, 8.2 percent in radio, 8.2 percent work for news agencies and 5.1 percent for online outlets. Of both print and multi-media journalists, 47.4 percent are stationed at central desk, 29.8 percent work either for regional or for national media together from regional level and 9.9 percent are working for local media stationed at the same location.

### Journalistic Roles

While answering questions about their professional roles, journalists in Bangladesh preferred being assertive with social issues. An overwhelming majority of the Bangladeshi journalists work to promote tolerance and cultural diversity (87.0%). They also put importance on advocacy for social change (79.6%), followed by letting people express their views (78.8%), providing analysis of current affairs (78.4%) and reporting things as they are (76.8%). They also prioritize political assertiveness by assigning importance and extreme importance to supporting national development (76.3%) and monitoring and scrutinizing political leaders (63.2%).

Journalists, however, show the least interest in supporting government policies (28.7%). They ranked roles like being an adversary of the government (28.9%) or conveying a positive image of political leadership (37.3%) the lowest. The journalists in general aim to provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience (75.9%).

*Table 1: Roles of journalists*

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	323	87.0	4.41	.89
Advocate for social change	323	79.6	4.16	1.11
Let people express their views	326	78.8	4.21	.98
Provide analysis of current affairs	329	78.4	4.14	.89
Educate the audience	328	77.4	4.19	1.03
Report things as they are	327	76.8	4.13	1.09
Support national development	316	76.3	4.19	1.08
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	324	75.9	4.16	1.03
Tell stories about the world	315	68.9	3.94	1.06
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	321	63.2	3.84	1.02
Provide information people need to make political decisions	314	60.5	3.74	1.16
Influence public opinion	312	59.3	3.69	1.25
Monitor and scrutinize business	316	51.3	3.52	1.20
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	312	51.0	3.45	1.16
Be a detached observer	305	47.9	3.31	1.40
Motivate people to participate in political activity	286	42.7	3.09	1.36
Set the political agenda	296	40.2	3.04	1.28
Provide entertainment and relaxation	308	38.3	3.16	1.23
Convey a positive image of political leadership	295	37.3	2.94	1.37
Be an adversary of the government	263	28.9	2.54	1.52
Support government policy	279	28.7	2.76	1.30

Question: Please tell me how important each of these things is in your work. 5 means you find them extremely important, 4 means very important, 3 means somewhat important, 2 means little importance, and 1 means unimportant.

### Professional Ethics

Journalists in Bangladesh strongly believe in the importance of professional ethics. Three-fourths of the respondents (75.2%) strongly and 17.1 percent somewhat agree with the notion that journalists should always adhere to codes of ethics, regardless of situation and context. The lowest standard deviation (s=0.66) indicates the consistency of their stance on this particular issue. One-fourth of them (24.7%) selected "strongly agree" or "somewhat agree" when considering if it is acceptable to

set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require. Slightly more than half of the interviewed journalists (52.4%) somewhat or strongly agree that ethical practice depends on the specific situation, and 40.4 percent of the respondents opined ethical practice in journalism as depending largely on personal judgment (see Table 2).

But in regards to some questions about journalistic practices, journalists showed a mixed response. Slightly less than half of the journalists (46.5%) justified using hidden microphones or cameras as newsgathering tools on occasion, compared to 11.2 percent who always used these tools. Similarly, 38.1 percent opined in favor of using confidential documents without authorization occasionally while 8.0 percent support this technique as always justified. Paying people for confidential information was supported by 40.7 percent of journalists and hiding their professional identity while talking with somebody was also considered justified occasionally by 31.3 percent of the respondents. In nearly every case, journalists do not favor altering photographs (97.5%), with only 0.6 percent justifying this practice always and 1.9 percent occasionally. At the same time, more than 95 percent of the respondents refuse to approve the following practices under any circumstances: using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors, publishing unverified content, accepting money from sources and altering or fabricating quotes from sources (see Table 3).

*Table 2: Ethical orientations of journalists*

	N	Percentage saying "strongly" and "somewhat agree"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context	338	92.3	4.66	.66
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	330	52.4	3.24	1.45
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	327	40.4	2.98	1.46
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	316	24.7	2.38	1.41

Question: The following statements describe different approaches to journalism. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree. 5 means you strongly agree, 4 means somewhat agree, 3 means undecided, 2 means somewhat disagree, and 1 means strongly disagree.

*Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists*

	N	Percentage saying "always justified"	Percentage saying "justified on occasion"
Using hidden microphones or cameras	312	11.2	46.5
Paying people for confidential information	317	9.8	40.7
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	293	8.5	33.4
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	312	8.0	38.1
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	313	4.8	9.3
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	318	2.5	17.6
Claiming to be somebody else	316	2.5	31.3
Publishing stories with unverified content	303	2.3	2.3
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	303	1.3	2.0
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	306	1.0	2.6
Accepting money from sources	302	.7	2.6
Altering photographs	322	.6	1.9

Question: Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?

## Professional Autonomy and Influences

Bangladeshi journalists reported a fairly high degree of professional autonomy. Two-thirds of the journalists enjoy complete and/or a great deal of freedom (61.0%) while selecting stories, and in case of aspects emphasized the freedom rate is 64.2 percent. These news professionals, however, confirm that their participation in editorial coordination meetings is a rare phenomenon. Only 0.6 percent of the journalists claim that they always participate in editorial coordination and 21.8 percent participate almost never, the rest of the participants participate sometimes, rarely or very often.

Bangladeshi journalists rank as the most influential factors their ethical practice (82.3%), followed by media laws and regulations (71.2%) as the second most influential factor in their day to day professional practice. Information access or lack of access is also a matter viewed as influential (55.1%). The influence of public relation factors was ranked lowest (13.8%). Feedback from audiences, censorship and competing news organizations were also considered by some to be influential, while they deny any acceptance from business people (16.2%) in context of influence.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	327	82.3	4.31	1.05
Media laws and regulation	323	71.2	3.90	1.24
Editorial policy	310	67.4	3.82	1.29
Your personal values and beliefs	323	56.0	3.55	1.44
Information access	305	55.1	3.47	1.29
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	311	53.7	3.43	1.19
Feedback from the audience	328	49.1	3.34	1.39
Audience research and data	293	49.1	3.44	1.20
Competing news organizations	324	48.8	3.21	1.46
Availability of news-gathering resources	295	45.1	3.33	1.16
Managers of the news organization	300	43.3	3.20	1.27
Owners of the news organization	279	43.0	3.16	1.40
Censorship	303	41.9	3.08	1.48
Time limits	311	36.3	3.28	1.12
Religious considerations	290	33.4	2.69	1.54
Advertising considerations	272	26.5	2.85	1.19
Relationships with news sources	317	24.9	2.62	1.36
Your peers on the staff	322	21.7	2.58	1.17
Military, police and state security	302	20.9	2.39	1.34
Politicians	311	20.3	2.27	1.35
Pressure groups	311	19.9	2.23	1.35
Profit expectations	244	18.4	2.30	1.27
Friends, acquaintances and family	325	16.9	2.00	1.34
Colleagues in other media	326	16.3	2.15	1.29
Business people	303	16.2	2.06	1.29
Government officials	309	15.9	2.07	1.30
Public relations	311	13.8	2.17	1.23

Question: Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work. 5 means it is extremely influential, 4 means very influential, 3 means somewhat influential, 2 means little influential, and 1 means not influential.

## Journalism in Transition

Journalism in Bangladesh has changed notably in recent years, however, this transformation is very recent and incomplete. The journalism profession in Bangladesh as a whole remains uncertain and volatile. In collaboration with the digital era, practitioners find importance in acquiring more technological skills, like improving their aptitude using search engines, which are considered paramount changes. The average working hours of journalists have also experienced a rapid change, with time allocation for researching stories declining. According to the majority of journalists interviewed, higher education seems to be a precondition for modern journalists, with a rise in importance of a university degree and a relevant degree in journalism. The considered relevance of journalism in society also indicates a positive change with a sharp increase in the necessity of journalism education in only the last five years.

Journalists, based on their personal work experience, feel that following western ways of journalism practice still remain important, a sentiment that is still increasing. The recent explosion of media houses over the past five years in Bangladesh has strengthened the professional competition in unprecedented ways. Professionals' perception towards their audience's involvement in news production, including feedback from audiences and the importance of audience market research, shows a concurrent change towards a strong favorable regard for the audience. User generated content and interest towards sensational news are the two factors that have functionally weakened over the last five years.

Questions regarding changes in journalism over time were only presented to journalists who had five years or more of professional experience.

*Table 5: Changes in journalism*

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
The use of search engines	222	91.4	.9
Technical skills	228	88.6	1.8
The relevance of journalism for society	224	82.1	6.3
Having a university degree	226	81.0	3.1
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	229	77.3	4.8
Average working hours of journalists	227	76.2	6.6
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	227	64.8	14.5
Time available for researching stories	227	63.4	18.9
The credibility of journalism	228	59.6	21.9
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	223	70.0	13.0

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Bangladesh. 5 means they have increased a lot, 4 means they have somewhat increased, 3 means there has been no change, 2 means they have somewhat decreased, and 1 means they have decreased a lot.

**Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism**

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Competition	226	86.3	6.2
Journalism education	233	76.8	8.6
Audience feedback	219	70.3	10.0
Social media, such as Banglanews24.com	221	70.1	13.6
Advertising considerations	217	65.9	10.1
Audience involvement in news production	221	63.8	10.0
Audience research	217	62.7	13.4
User-generated contents, such as blogs	214	59.8	21.5
Profit making pressures	209	53.1	13.4
Public relations	216	52.8	15.7
Ethical standards	229	47.6	30.1
Western ways of practicing journalism	197	41.1	24.4
Pressure toward sensational news	211	39.3	34.6

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in Bangladesh. 5 means they have strengthened a lot, 4 means they have somewhat strengthened, 3 means they did not change, 2 means they have somewhat weakened, and 1 means they have weakened a lot.

### Journalistic Trust

Regarding trust in various public institutions, Bangladeshi journalists highly trust media institutes (64.7%), followed by the parliament (57.7%) and the judiciary/courts (49.5%). Journalists also report having trust in the military (43.0%) surprisingly much more than the police (9.9%). Political parties (8.6%) and politicians stand at the bottom of the trust continuum. Likewise, journalists did not consider trade unions (11.7%) and religious leaders (18.7%) as trustworthy institutions. In sum, there are strong similarities regarding trust in news media among the journalists indicated by the low standard deviation values. There seems to be some dissimilarity in regards to politics and religion.

**Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions**

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The news media	306	64.7	3.75	.98
The parliament [JatiyoSongsad]	310	57.7	3.57	1.19
The judiciary/the courts	305	49.5	3.34	1.24
The military	300	43.0	3.18	1.19
The government [Awami League]	302	29.8	3.01	1.08
Religious leaders	294	18.7	2.34	1.19
Trade unions	300	11.7	2.41	1.01
Politicians in general	299	10.0	2.17	1.09
The police	304	9.9	2.08	1.09
Political parties	303	8.6	2.30	1.01

Question: Please tell me on a scale of 5 to 1 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions. 5 means you have complete trust, 4 means you have a great deal of trust, 3 means you have some trust, 2 means you have little trust, and 1 means you have no trust at all.

### Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	3,766 [Federal Union of Journalists Record 2013]
<i>Sampling method:</i>	Stratified random sampling for newsroom, quota sampling form media and systematic sampling for journalists for newsroom.
<i>Sample size:</i>	352 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	Face to face
<i>Response rate:</i>	91.9%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	07/2013 –09/2013

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