



## Country Report

# Journalists in Malawi

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17 January, 2017

## Introduction

The Worlds of Journalism Study ([www.worldsofjournalism.org](http://www.worldsofjournalism.org)) was one of the most comprehensive surveys of the culture and practice of journalism in Malawi since 2010, when the Journalists Union of Malawi (JUMA) did a survey of journalists' conditions of service. To a certain extent, the two studies complement each other. The findings of the JUMA study can be accessed from here: [https://www.academia.edu/5088900/Journalists\\_Union\\_of\\_Malawi\\_survey\\_on\\_journalists\\_conditions\\_of\\_services\\_in\\_Malawi\\_2010](https://www.academia.edu/5088900/Journalists_Union_of_Malawi_survey_on_journalists_conditions_of_services_in_Malawi_2010).

## Background of Journalists

Out of the 182 journalists interviewed for the Worlds of Journalism Study in Malawi, 35.1 percent were female. The majority (53.3%) were young, i.e. aged 30 years or less. The mean age of the interviewees was 31.23 years ( $s=7.79$ ), with the youngest being aged 20 and the oldest 69 years. The majority of the respondents (94.8%) was fairly educated and held a college diploma or a university degree. Most of the journalists specialized in journalism or in other communication field (85.9%), making them fully qualified to practice journalism professionally.

## Journalists in the Newsroom

The study revealed that the majority of Malawian journalists held a full-time job (84.1%), while only 7.7 percent and 1.1 percent worked as part-time and freelance journalists respectively. Others did not indicate their employment status. Of those with full or part-time employment, 86.1 percent said they held permanent positions, and 13.9 percent worked on a temporary contract.

Generally, Malawian journalists are not very experienced. Their average experience was 6.45 years ( $s=5.42$ , median=5). The majority of these journalists were generalists (79.4%), i.e. they covered or reported on different beats. A large number of the interviewed journalists belonged to a media or journalist association or union (76.4%), which is a signal that Malawian journalists consider themselves as professionals who should collectively defend and advocate for their field.

## Journalistic Roles

Malawian journalists are ambivalent in their roles. They perceive themselves as faithful reporters and objective analysts of current affairs, who not only help their audiences make informed decisions, but also give voice to the people (see Table 1). They also perceive themselves as monitors and scrutinizers of political leadership and business. This approach would classify Malawian journalists as operating within the Occidental/Western journalism framework. However, the same journalists also see themselves as advocates for social change, supporters of national development, motivators of popular political participation, and educators of their audiences. More than half of the respondents stuck to their traditional roles of providing advice, orientation and direction for daily life as well as providing entertainment and relaxation. While the Malawian journalists portray themselves as professionals with the mission to contribute positively to national governance and promote social change, they avoid being adversaries of their government or promoters of political leadership.

*Table 1: Roles of journalists*

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	175	96.6	4.74	.65
Provide analysis of current affairs	172	93.6	4.51	.71
Let people express their views	174	92.0	4.54	.72
Educate the audience	172	89.5	4.48	.81
Provide information people need to make political decisions	169	85.2	4.29	1.05
Support national development	169	84.6	4.37	.93
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	173	83.8	4.28	.97
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	170	83.5	4.28	1.00
Advocate for social change	169	82.8	4.30	.91
Monitor and scrutinize business	169	75.7	4.10	.94
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	170	74.7	4.13	1.04
Influence public opinion	166	74.7	4.07	1.10
Motivate people to participate in political activity	167	74.3	4.02	1.12
Tell stories about the world	173	73.4	4.05	1.01
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	165	72.1	3.95	1.10
Be a detached observer	151	70.9	3.97	1.27
Provide entertainment and relaxation	167	68.3	3.89	1.15
Set the political agenda	163	65.6	3.78	1.23
Support government policy	166	53.0	3.50	1.28
Be an adversary of the government	157	47.1	2.98	1.58
Convey a positive image of political leadership	160	40.6	2.95	1.49

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

Malawian journalists perceive themselves as professionals who strictly observe journalism ethic codes prescribed by professional associations and unions, the government communication regulator, and individual media houses, which emphasize the need for balance, objectivity, fairness, relevance and thoroughness of journalism. Malawian journalists view journalism ethics as codified and normative, as the rejection of journalistic ethics being a matter of personal judgement and the disapproval of controversial newsgathering tactics and approaches indicate (see Table 3). The summary of their responses is captured in Table 2 and Table 3 below.

*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	176	96.0	4.70	.65
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	171	49.7	3.00	1.53
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	168	42.3	2.99	1.45
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	171	32.7	2.54	1.48

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"
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	173	17.9	44.5
Using hidden microphones or cameras	174	14.9	48.3
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	167	12.6	23.4
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	170	11.8	37.6
Claiming to be somebody else	175	10.3	28.0
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	167	7.8	7.2
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	166	7.2	31.9
Accepting money from sources	166	7.2	18.7
Paying people for confidential information	171	7.0	38.6
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	165	6.7	20.0
Publishing stories with unverified content	164	6.1	5.5
Altering photographs	165	6.1	10.3

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

Ideally, journalists are supposed to act autonomously and exercise independent and professional news-making. Journalistic autonomy seems to be cherished and respected in Malawian newsrooms, for quite a good number of respondents claimed they were free to personally decide which aspects of a story should be emphasized (62.6%, mean=3.83, s=.97). 60.4 percent (mean=3.82, s=.99) of the respondents reported that overall, they were free to select a story to work on, and 75.0 percent (mean=4.17, s=1.06) indicated that they participated in editorial coordination “always” and “very often”.

Despite their freedom to participate in editorial decisions and to independently choose stories to work on, Malawian journalists face several factors that influence their work. The top ten influences are: journalism ethics, media laws and regulation, the news organization’s editorial policy, the availability of news-gathering resources, information access – probably because Malawi still does not have a law to oblige public information holders (such as government officials) to give out information –, editorial supervisors and higher editors – such as section editors, shift editors, and sub-editors, time limits or deadlines, feedback from the audience, competition among news organizations, and audience research and data.

In the Malawi context, managers are those in control of administrative and financial matters, while editorial supervisors and editors are in charge of the news content. These and other influences are captured in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	173	89.0	4.50	.80
Media laws and regulation	171	84.8	4.35	.80
Editorial policy	173	84.4	4.28	.96
Availability of news-gathering resources	168	82.1	4.23	.87
Information access	168	81.0	4.20	.84
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	169	78.7	4.07	.99
Time limits	172	76.2	4.08	.94
Feedback from the audience	170	75.9	4.10	.90
Competing news organizations	169	72.8	3.98	.97
Audience research and data	161	72.7	3.89	1.08
Owners of the news organization	164	72.0	3.90	1.23
Managers of the news organization	170	71.2	3.93	1.09
Your personal values and beliefs	169	71.0	3.95	1.13
Censorship	169	69.2	3.92	.97
Relationships with news sources	162	56.2	3.62	1.10
Religious considerations	160	51.9	3.44	1.23
Your peers on the staff	170	50.6	3.29	1.14
Advertising considerations	163	49.1	3.32	1.13
Colleagues in other media	170	44.7	3.25	1.24
Profit expectations	159	42.8	3.04	1.32
Government officials	168	42.3	3.16	1.29
Public relations	168	41.1	3.25	1.14
Military, police and state security	169	33.7	3.04	1.28
Friends, acquaintances and family	159	32.7	2.87	1.33
Business people	169	31.4	2.94	1.25
Politicians	163	30.1	2.82	1.34
Pressure groups	168	20.8	2.57	1.21

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

All over the world, the practice of journalism is changing, partly due to the influence of new information and communication technology as well as related services, such as news platforms and social media. The rise in community journalism and citizen reporting may be another influence. As Table 5 illustrates, Malawian journalists who had more than five years of practice perceived, inter alia, an increase in the journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions, the importance of technical skills, the use of search engines, the relevance of journalism for society, and the importance of having a university degree.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
The use of search engines	62	83.9	1.6
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	64	81.3	1.6
The relevance of journalism for society	62	79.0	1.6
Having a university degree	62	77.4	3.2
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	62	75.8	3.2
Technical skills	62	72.6	1.6
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	64	71.9	6.3
Average working hours of journalists	60	71.7	3.3
The credibility of journalism	61	70.5	9.8
Time available for researching stories	62	41.9	22.6

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Malawi. 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	64	89.1	-
Journalism education	63	87.3	6.3
Social media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram	63	87.3	4.8
Audience feedback	64	81.3	7.8
Advertising considerations	64	78.1	1.6
Ethical standards	64	73.4	15.6
User-generated contents, such as blogs	60	73.3	11.7
Profit making pressures	62	71.0	4.8
Public relations	64	70.3	3.1
Western ways of practicing journalism	62	66.1	11.3
Pressure toward sensational news	61	63.9	18.0
Audience research	64	56.3	9.4
Audience involvement in news production	63	55.6	11.1

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in Malawi. 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.

Some of these changes, such as the increased freedom to make editorial decisions, technical skills, the strengthening of Western-style journalism, the credibility of journalism, and the use of search engines, are likely to have been influenced by improvements and expansion in journalism education in Malawi (see Table 6). The possession of a university degree and a journalism or communication degree in particular may have had a serious impact as well. Additionally, the interviewees observed a strengthening of ethical standards, advertising considerations, user-generated content in the form of personal blogs, and social media platforms, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, where views that normally not voiced in traditional mainstream media are presented freely. The increased presence of social media platforms and interactive news sites (stand alone and versions of traditional media

alike), as well as the availability of relatively cheap multimedia mobile phones and tablets over the years are likely to have strengthened audience feedback, mostly in reaction to online and broadcast stories.

The questions about changes in journalism were only presented to journalists who had five years or more of professional experience.

### Journalistic Trust

As Table 7 illustrates, journalists in Malawi do not have much trust in public institutions and politicians (all <50.0%), except for themselves via the news media. However, there are some institutions that are more trusted than others. For instance, the judiciary/the courts are the most trusted (or least distrusted) institution. They are followed by the military, religious leaders, and the parliament. Only 19.7 percent of the respondents had complete or a great deal of trust in the Malawi government, implicating that the majority had little or no trust at all. Worth noting is also the fact that politicians and political parties are the least trusted (or the most distrusted) among all public institutions.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The news media	146	61.0	3.76	.92
The judiciary/the courts	144	47.9	3.43	1.07
The military	141	44.0	3.35	1.10
Religious leaders	145	43.4	3.36	1.03
The parliament of Malawi	141	39.0	3.22	1.07
Trade unions	141	38.3	3.26	.96
The government of Malawi	147	19.7	2.59	1.07
The police	147	19.0	2.67	1.05
Politicians in general	141	7.1	1.98	.97
Political parties	142	4.9	2.09	.86

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>	330 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	simple random sampling, purposive quota sampling & convenience sample for newsrooms and simply systematic & based on quota for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	182 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face-to-face, telephone and mail/e-mail
<i>Response rate:</i>	48.19%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	01/2014-06/2014 and 05/2015-06/2015

