

Country Report

Journalists in Kenya

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Backgrounds of Journalists

Kenya boasts one of the vibrant media markets by the standards of East Africa. According to the Media Council of Kenya, there are about 3000 journalists operating in the country and who are registered with the statutory media regulating body. The number of journalists listed by the Media Council includes those who work for the media houses on a full time basis, correspondents, stringers or freelancers, and also students at the nation's media schools. In order to appreciate the kind of journalist working in the Kenyan media it is helpful to first consider the Kenyan media landscape. There is almost an even spread of radio in the urban and in the rural, even if the urban may appear to have more stations. The majority of the media established in the city are the traditional ones: print, television, and radio. Most of these urban-based legacy media target the entire country and largely operate in either of the national languages of Kiswahili and English. The country has four national newspapers: *Nation*, *Standard*, *Star* and *People*, all published in English. The last regular daily publication is the Kiswahili language newspaper, *Taifa Leo*, a sister publication to the largest circulating newspaper: *Nation*.

The country successfully migrated from analogue to digital broadcast in 2015, which opened much of the previously unreached parts of the country to national broadcast. In times past broadcast reach depended on the number of booster stations a broadcaster had. But in the post migration era the Broadcast Signal Distributors (BSDs) uniformly distributed the content to areas of the country under their network. This increased the reach of the television content from the domination of the previous half a dozen to now over 60 channels. Among the leading television broadcasters are the state owned KBC (Kenya Broadcasting Corporation), Citizen, NTV, KTN, and K24. These stations operate from the capital Nairobi and have the widest distribution. Nairobi is also the largest media market in Kenya.

There are few radio stations that broadcast nationally; the main ones being state owned KBC Radio with two channels – one broadcasting in Kiswahili and the other in English, and then privately owned Citizen (broadcasting in Kiswahili). Radio Maisha and Milele FM are fast growing in popularity. But overall, there are slightly under 200 radio stations, most of which broadcast regionally and largely in local languages.

The roughly 3000 journalists registered with the Media Council of Kenya cover the entire country and across the breadth of media landscape: stations broadcasting in the full range of Kenyan languages of Kiswahili, English and vernacular; print media, television and radio. The majority of these journalists are either correspondents or stringers. The former are held on a retainer basis i.e. the holding media company paying them a basic monthly allowance plus additional payment for whatever story they covered within that month. Stringers are paid per piece of work done. Further, correspondents must remain loyal to the holding company, whereas stringers can hawk their work to any media house willing to publish or broadcast it.

This study sampled 341 journalists. Of these, 42.3 percent were female while 56.3 percent were male. Nearly five percent of the population sampled either refused to respond to the question or simply stated that they did not know the answer to the question.

The median age of the Kenyan journalists is 30 years with a mean age of 31.94 years ($s=7.14$). A majority of Kenyan journalists (90.9%) have completed university education. In terms of the spread, 65.9 percent of the respondents completed a college/Bachelor's degree or its equivalent, while 24.5 percent completed a Master's degree or its equivalent. Two of the respondents, making for 0.6 percent of the sample, had completed doctorate studies, while those who had other responses or did not complete a university or college education made for 6.3 percent of the sample.

There are very few Kenyan journalists who had no specialization whatsoever during their training (7.4%). The majority of the journalists specialized in journalism (51.1%); 21.4 percent specialized in both journalism and another communication field, while 20.1 percent specialized in a field of communication other than journalism.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of the sample worked full-time in the newsroom (80.5%). Another 11.1 percent held part-time employments, while 6.9 percent were freelance journalists. Those who chose responses other than the above made for 1.5 percent of the population. Of those with full or part-time employment, nearly three out of four journalists (73.9%) were engaged on a permanent basis, while 26.1 percent worked on a temporary contract.

Journalists' years of work experience varied, but not wildly. The median period of engagement and professional experience was thus five years, with a mean of 6.16 years ($s=5.07$). However, the majority of Kenyan journalists worked on randomly assigned beats without any specialization. The total proportion of journalists that worked as generalists was 63.9 percent, whereas only 36.1 percent considered themselves as specialists working on specific beats. Further, Kenyan journalists, their years of experience notwithstanding seem to or be identified largely with specific media houses. On average, journalists had worked for a mere 1.25 newsrooms ($s=.82$). The difference however, among journalists who had worked elsewhere and those whose only engagement had been in journalism was relatively not very big. While 53.2 percent of the journalists had not known any other employment or experience, 46.8 percent had engaged in other jobs prior to joining journalism. It does appear that unions are an important component of the experience of journalists. A large number (63.0%) were members of the union that brings journalists together, while only 37.0 percent were no members.

Earlier we discussed the range of newspapers in the country. The sample of respondents, in fact, seems to have been drawn from the full range of these media houses. An average of 22.4 percent worked for a daily newspaper, while 3.3 percent worked for a weekly publication. The journalists who worked for a magazine made for only 0.6 percent of those responding to the questions. In total, about a quarter of the journalists worked for a print outlet. Most of the respondents (39.1%) worked for a television station with 26.0 percent being drawn from radio. Journalists who worked for a news agency made for only 6.6 percent of the respondents, while a combined number of those who worked for an online publication made slightly over

2.0 percent of the respondents. A sample population of 1.5 percent worked for a stand-alone online publication, while 0.6 percent worked for an offline outlet.

Journalistic Roles

It is fairly informative how journalists view their roles in the Kenyan society. Kenyan journalists found it most important to report things the way they are, to educate the audience and to promote tolerance and diversity. The relevance of these roles was fairly undisputed among the interviewed journalists as the relatively low standard deviations ($s=.75$, $s=.77$, and $s=.88$ respectively) indicate. It is particularly noteworthy the notion of reporting things as they are and promoting tolerance. About a decade ago, the Kenyan media was perceived to have contributed to the spate of political violence that engulfed the country. The media has strenuously struggled to shed off that perception.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	310	92.9	3.57	.75
Educate the audience	332	90.4	4.50	.77
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	335	85.1	4.28	.88
Provide analysis of current affairs	334	81.7	4.08	1.00
Let people express their views	333	81.1	4.23	.89
Tell stories about the world	336	78.9	4.09	.98
Advocate for social change	335	78.8	4.08	1.11
Support national development	331	69.2	3.79	1.24
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	329	68.1	3.78	1.30
Influence public opinion	331	67.7	3.81	1.13
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	336	67.6	3.83	1.06
Provide information people need to make political decisions	324	65.7	3.73	1.19
Be a detached observer	310	61.0	3.57	1.20
Provide entertainment and relaxation	332	57.2	3.48	1.23
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	333	55.9	3.52	1.25
Monitor and scrutinize business	329	54.1	3.47	1.22
Motivate people to participate in political activity	333	52.3	3.39	1.26
Set the political agenda	330	48.2	3.30	1.32
Support government policy	327	45.9	3.25	1.17
Be an adversary of the government	330	36.1	2.76	1.44
Convey a positive image of political leadership	327	31.8	2.65	1.37

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.

Further, journalists tend to see themselves as objective and therefore it is little surprising that straight reporting scored highly on the list. Other roles with a standard deviation score less than $s=1.0$ included letting people express their views (81.1%, $s=.89$) and telling stories about the world (78.9%, $s=.98$). Providing analysis of current affairs was considered an important role by 81.7 percent of the respondents. The other roles, in their order of percentage scores and possibly relative importance, are indicated in Table 1 below. It is instructive what Kenyan journalists considered less important roles: conveying a positive image of political leadership (31.8%) and being an adversary of the government (36.1%). Nearly all roles related to politics are at the bottom of the table. This is a unique finding, as Kenyan media is often accused of being overly political. The headlines and lead stories are often all about politics. It is noteworthy that journalism in Kenya can sometimes be fairly adversarial in relation to the government. Given the promulgation of a new constitution nearly seven years ago, with clauses protective

of media freedom, there is often a boldness in Kenyan media which is unique compared to the experiences of neighboring countries.

Roles supportive of a development agenda scored somewhere in the middle of the table. This is an important and surprising perception as well. Kenya is a developing country and it would have been natural to expect that development was a default role for the media. But development-related responses scored 78.8 percent and 69.2 percent respectively. While this is still a high score, it is not among the top considerations of the media.

Professional Ethics

Since the enactment of the Media Act (2007) and Amended (2013), a lot of energy has been directed in Kenya towards sensitizing journalists to the necessity of observing ethics in their work. The Media Act is particularly unique in that the Second Schedule of the Act provides a code of ethics, which given the backing by parliament, has legal strength in Kenya as opposed to journalistic practice elsewhere. It is therefore not a surprise that journalists agreed very strongly (95.9%) that they should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context. The low standard deviation ($s=.65$) suggests that there is little variation on that. But it is also important to note that the orientation of what is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment obtained the lowest score of 38.3 percent ($s=1.45$). It is also important to note the variance between the first score and the second score (see Table 2). While the notion that journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of the situation and context scored 95.9 percent (mean=4.69), the second in line, that what is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation, scored 64.7 percent (mean=3.56). It can be concluded on this matter that there is largely some agreement on this principle.

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	340	95.9	4.69	.65
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	340	64.7	3.56	1.31
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	325	47.1	3.09	1.44
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	339	38.3	2.79	1.45

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.

Regarding the justification of the use of controversial reporting methods by journalists, it can be considered that there is some consensus on this matter as well. For example, 15.0 percent believe that the use of hidden microphones or cameras is always justified, whereas the number of respondents who believe that it is justified only on occasions is distinctly higher (70.4%) (see Table 3). The use of recreations or dramatizations of news overall attracted a fairly low score. A total of 54.7 percent of the respondents checked this item, with 10.7 percent saying that it is always justified and 44.0 percent that it is only justified on occasion. Kenya generally does not have incidences of re-creations or dramatizations of news by

actors, probably giving the basis of this low response to this item. The same argument can be advanced to the next item of getting employed in a firm in order to get inside information. There are hardly incidences of this nature reported in the Kenyan journalism scene. Broadly, it is not clear why the remaining responses all attracted few respondents.

Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists

	N	Percentage saying “always justified”	Percentage saying “justified on occasion”
Using hidden microphones or cameras	334	15.0	70.4
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	318	10.7	44.0
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	334	6.6	56.9
Paying people for confidential information	330	5.8	50.9
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	330	5.8	45.5
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	328	5.5	30.5
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	332	5.4	40.1
Claiming to be somebody else	333	4.5	38.7
Publishing stories with unverified content	332	1.8	13.6
Accepting money from sources	330	1.8	18.5
Altering photographs	330	1.8	19.1
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	332	1.5	14.8

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

The perception of freedom of journalists and by extension of the media is an interesting concept in Kenya. It is only in the lifetime of most journalists that the constitution has, in Article 34, guaranteed freedom of the press. Three out of five respondents (60.7%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. With a total of 59.9 percent, the number of respondents who had complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story was slightly lower. Still, a majority of journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) “always” or “very often” (62.4%). On the whole, one would have expected a higher score on this response. But why these responses? May be a follow up question would have been what the source of the suppression of these freedoms. Table 4 presents data on the perceived influences to which we must then turn.

What do Kenyan journalists perceive as the biggest influence on their practice? Top of the list is “media laws and regulation” (84.9%), with the highest mean score of 4.22 (s=.84). Other influences with a standard deviation score of less than s=1.0 include information access, resources for gathering news, feedback from the audience, as well as editorial supervisors and higher editors. All of these influences reached a percentage of more than 70 percent and had a mean score of 4 and above.

It is interesting to note the relatively low scores with regards to questions on the role of government or government officials in influence the practice of journalism. Government officials, as a source of influence, attracted a score of just 31.8 percent. From looking at the scores in Table 4, one would draw a conclusion that elements that relate to the institutional workings of the media tend to be perceived to have a greater influence on the news process than external factors, such as pressure groups, business and others. A conclusion can be drawn that factors relating to

new processing such as time limits (72.2%), editorial supervisors (73.4%), and managers of the news organization (66.9%) are more influential than factors perceived to emanate from the outside, e.g. public relations (37.7%) or advertising considerations (51.1%). Of course there are surprises in these perceived influences. Profit expectations attracted a score of 53.9 percent (mean=3.38, s=1.18). The conclusion that can be drawn from the data is that the Kenyan journalists are fairly autonomous and that there are few forces from outside the media institution that influence the professionals.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Media laws and regulation	332	84.9	4.22	.84
Editorial policy	338	83.1	4.20	1.02
Information access	337	81.6	4.20	.84
Journalism ethics	339	80.5	4.13	1.00
Availability of news-gathering resources	334	77.5	4.07	.90
Feedback from the audience	330	77.0	4.00	.87
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	335	73.4	3.94	.90
Time limits	338	72.2	3.90	1.05
Competing news organizations	335	70.1	3.81	1.00
Audience research and data	333	67.9	3.82	1.04
Managers of the news organization	335	66.9	3.79	1.10
Censorship	334	63.2	3.72	1.01
Owners of the news organization	331	62.5	3.65	1.26
Relationships with news sources	333	62.2	3.61	1.10
Your personal values and beliefs	336	60.7	3.71	1.20
Profit expectations	330	53.9	3.38	1.18
Advertising considerations	329	51.1	3.46	1.06
Religious considerations	332	50.0	3.41	1.34
Colleagues in other media	333	40.5	3.14	1.09
Public relations	334	37.7	2.98	1.21
Your peers on the staff	332	33.7	3.08	1.04
Government officials	333	31.8	2.91	1.16
Military, police and state security	331	30.2	2.73	1.27
Business people	332	26.5	2.67	1.19
Friends, acquaintances and family	337	26.4	2.73	1.27
Politicians	334	20.4	2.48	1.13
Pressure groups	332	17.2	2.38	1.10

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

There appears to be a consensus that one element that has impacted journalism most in Kenya is the use of search engines, or generally, the use of technology (see Table 5). This attracts 89.4 percent of the respondents and there seems to be a consensus about it with only 0.7 percent saying that it has decreased. Journalists also tend to agree that the requirement of technical skills has increased with only 4.6 percent saying that it has decreased. Journalists thus agreed that technology is probably the biggest change they experience in the newsroom. Comparatively, there is not much consensus on other elements, such as time available for researching stories (50.3% with another 21.5% disagreeing), freedom to make editorial decisions (71.9% with another 15.7% disagreeing), the creditability of journalism (73.5% with another 17.2% disagreeing noting that it has decreased).

But journalists consider competition to be higher up among the influences on the trade and that competition is increasing. Over 90 percent (see Table 6) of respondents believe that there is an increase in competition. Only 2.6 percent disagree believing that competition has decreased and that this has weakened the media. Among the considerations that are taken into account as accounting for media strengthening include audience feedback (88.2%), blogs (82.6%), profit pressures (81.9%), audience research (79.5%), journalism education (79.2%). While the majority (67.5%) believe that public relations has strengthened the media a good number of respondents (16.2%) also think that it has weakened the media.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
The use of search engines	151	89.4	.7
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	151	82.1	7.3
Technical skills	151	82.1	4.6
Having a university degree	149	81.2	6.7
The relevance of journalism for society	151	80.8	9.3
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	148	78.4	10.1
The credibility of journalism	151	73.5	17.2
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	153	71.9	15.7
Average working hours of journalists	153	61.4	8.5
Time available for researching stories	149	50.3	21.5

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Kenya. 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	156	92.3	2.6
Social media	154	92.2	5.2
Audience feedback	152	88.2	2.0
Advertising considerations	155	86.5	5.8
User-generated contents, such as blogs	155	82.6	9.7
Profit making pressures	155	81.9	7.1
Audience research	156	79.5	8.3
Journalism education	154	79.2	8.4
Audience involvement in news production	150	76.7	5.3
Pressure toward sensational news	148	72.3	9.5
Western ways of practicing journalism	145	69.7	8.3
Ethical standards	157	69.4	17.8
Public relations	154	67.5	16.2

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

When it comes to trust in public institutions, Kenyan journalists turned out to have the most trust in their own institution – the news media (73.8%, $s=.90$). An interesting question would be why journalists believe that the media is the most trusted institution. Journalists placed religious leaders on second position (47.3%, $mean=3.25$, $s=1.05$), but still way below their score of trust in the media. The score on all other institutions are comparatively low although there seems to be a consensus among the journalists on these findings. The standard deviation scores vary between $s=0.90$ to $s=1.01$. They are also agreed that the least trusted individuals are political parties (8.8%), followed by politicians (9.0%) and the police (12.9%). It would thus appear, that from the perception of Kenyan journalists they

are the most trusted institutions, and apart from religious leaders who come a poor second, there is hardly any other institution that compare with them in the trust indicator.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The news media	313	73.8	3.89	.90
Religious leaders	311	47.3	3.25	1.05
The judiciary/the courts	310	36.8	3.16	.90
Trade unions	311	23.5	2.86	.89
The parliament	311	22.5	2.77	.95
The government	312	22.4	2.88	.90
The military	309	18.4	2.68	1.01
The police	311	12.9	2.46	.98
Politicians in general	311	9.0	2.14	1.00
Political parties	307	8.8	2.29	.93

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>	3,000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	convenience sample for newsrooms and convenience sample for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	341 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face-to-face
<i>Response rate:</i>	60.0%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	2014-2015