



## Country Report

# Journalists in the UAE

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## Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in the UAE is an Arab expat who is less than 40 years old. 50.2 percent of the 237 interviewed journalists were women. On average, journalists were 37.73 years old ( $s=10.29$ ); half of them were younger than 36 years. Journalists tend to be well educated: 91.8 percent of the respondents held a degree from a graduate program and 72.6 percent have specialized in journalism and/or communication. Across the whole sample of journalists in the UAE, 60.8 percent are Arab expats and only 28.7 percent are locals (with Emirati nationality). Journalism and media are not attractive fields for locals due to social reasons and low salaries. 92 percent of the journalists in the UAE are Muslim.

## Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of the journalists interviewed in the UAE held a full-time position (88.7%), whereas 8.6 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 1.8 percent worked as freelance journalists. Of those with full or part-time employment, 87.5 percent said they held permanent positions, and 12.5 percent worked on a temporary contract.

Half of the UAE journalists worked on a specific desk (52.4%), such as politics, local news or sports. The remaining 47.6 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on various topics and subjects. On the whole, journalists in the UAE worked for 1.39 newsrooms ( $s=.98$ ); 16.5 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. Less than half of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (43.5%).

The majority of the UAE journalists in the sample worked for print media: 58.9 percent contributed to daily newspapers and 3.0 percent to magazines. There are no weekly or online newspapers operating in the UAE. Daily newspapers only have their electronic versions of the printed newspapers. Another 29.1 percent of the journalists worked for private or public service television, and 3.4 for private or public radio. Few journalists in the sample (5.5%) reported working for the local news agency (WAM).

## Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, journalists in the UAE found it most important to educate the audience, to influence public opinion, to promote tolerance and cultural diversity, to tell stories about the world, and to support government policy (see Table 1).

Still, more than two out of five respondents found it important to convey a positive image of political leadership, to provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience, to report things as they are, to support national development, to provide analysis of current affairs, to be an adversary of the government, to provide information people need to make political decisions, to let people express their views, and to provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life.

Other roles were supported by only a minority of respondents. Following traits belong to these roles: monitoring and scrutinizing political leaders, setting the political agenda, monitoring and scrutinizing business, motivating people to participate in political activity, being a detached observer, advocating for social change, as well as providing entertainment and relaxation.

*Table 1: Roles of journalists*

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Educate the audience	219	49.8	3.04	1.68
Influence public opinion	213	49.3	3.17	1.49
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	222	49.1	3.09	1.67
Tell stories about the world	216	47.7	3.08	1.51
Support government policy	211	46.4	3.09	1.61
Convey a positive image of political leadership	203	45.8	3.09	1.57
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	222	45.5	3.05	1.54
Report things as they are	219	44.7	3.10	1.47
Support national development	208	44.2	2.99	1.55
Provide analysis of current affairs	217	43.3	3.15	1.40
Be an adversary of the government	179	42.5	2.81	1.80
Provide information people need to make political decisions	201	42.3	2.88	1.51
Let people express their views	207	42.0	3.01	1.42
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	215	40.5	2.95	1.44
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	207	38.6	3.01	1.41
Set the political agenda	203	37.9	2.95	1.50
Monitor and scrutinize business	210	37.1	3.04	1.37
Motivate people to participate in political activity	193	36.3	2.84	1.45
Be a detached observer	205	34.6	2.97	1.36
Advocate for social change	191	32.5	2.80	1.47
Provide entertainment and relaxation	218	31.7	2.85	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 the UAE generally demonstrated commitment to professional standards of ethics. The majority of the respondents agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Furthermore, slightly more than half of the journalists disagreed with the views that journalists' ethical decisions depend on the specific situation, that sometimes it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it, and that their ethical decisions are a matter of personal judgment.

*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	229	56.3	3.24	1.86
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	220	45.9	2.90	1.48
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	213	45.5	2.89	1.54
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	213	44.1	2.83	1.46

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.

The picture was mixed with regard to a selected number of potentially controversial reporting techniques. Most of the journalists did not support the use of re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors, publishing stories with unverified content, accepting money from sources, or getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information.

Only one in four journalists in the UAE said that it is justifiable on some occasions to claim to be somebody else.

Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists

	N	Percentage saying "always justified"	Percentage saying "justified on occasion"
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	221	10.4	16.7
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	216	6.0	16.7
Paying people for confidential information	119	5.9	19.3
Using hidden microphones or cameras	220	5.0	18.6
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	219	5.0	12.3
Claiming to be somebody else	211	3.3	25.1
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	215	2.8	9.8
Accepting money from sources	220	2.7	2.3
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	215	2.3	16.7
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	221	2.3	1.8
Altering photographs	219	2.3	2.3
Publishing stories with unverified content	222	1.4	5.4

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

Journalists in the UAE reported a relatively low degree of professional autonomy. Two out of five respondents (43.9%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. With a total of 47.3 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 higher. The minority of journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) "always" or "very often" (25.6%).

News production is influenced by a variety of factors. Among the potential sources of influences mentioned in the interview, "time limits" fared on top of the list among respondents in the UAE (see Table 4). Slightly less than half of the journalists found their work substantively constrained by media laws and regulation, by owners of the news organization, and by competing news organizations.

Also, more than two out of five respondents admitted their work was influenced by colleagues in other media, by profit expectations, by their peers on the staff, by public relations, and by information access (or lack thereof).

Overall, internal factors were found to be more influential than external constraints. Journalists in the UAE felt little influenced by business people, censorship, advertising considerations, pressure groups, politicians, government officials, the military, police and state security, as well as religion.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Time limits	227	49.8	3.35	1.43
Media laws and regulation	222	49.5	3.10	1.55
Owners of the news organization	225	49.3	3.29	1.41
Competing news organizations	218	46.3	3.08	1.45
Colleagues in other media	225	44.0	3.10	1.40
Profit expectations	206	42.7	3.24	1.35
Your peers on the staff	226	42.5	3.16	1.28
Public relations	214	41.6	2.94	1.40
Information access	221	40.3	2.87	1.51
Journalism ethics	224	39.7	2.88	1.59
Managers of the news organization	222	39.6	3.01	1.42
Audience research and data	219	39.3	3.11	1.35
Business people	199	39.2	3.04	1.41
Censorship	210	39.0	2.77	1.55
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	224	38.4	2.99	1.34
Availability of news-gathering resources	225	34.2	2.98	1.34
Advertising considerations	202	33.7	2.90	1.35
Pressure groups	200	33.0	2.70	1.49
Relationships with news sources	196	31.6	2.58	1.50
Politicians	196	31.1	2.56	1.45
Government officials	203	31.0	2.56	1.51
Feedback from the audience	223	30.9	2.66	1.39
Editorial policy	218	28.9	2.67	1.41
Military, police and state security	114	28.9	2.54	1.63
Friends, acquaintances and family	224	24.6	2.62	1.35
Religious considerations	227	22.5	2.35	1.44
Your personal values and beliefs	215	18.6	2.46	1.28

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

In recent years, there have been many changes in journalists’ job aspects. Especially the use of search engines, journalists’ improvement of their technical skills, and the importance of having a university degree had profoundly changed over the last five years (see Table 5). The aspects that have increased the least are the time available for researching stories, journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions, and their average working hours.

Influences on journalism and news production have changed as well (see Table 6). Here, it was especially the influence of social media, the feedback from the audience and user-generated contents (such as blogs) that had strengthened the most during the past five years.

The questions about changes in journalism 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	19	89.5	10.5
Technical skills	20	85.0	10.0
Having a university degree	21	76.2	14.3
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	20	70.0	20.0
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	20	70.0	15.0
The relevance of journalism for society	20	70.0	30.0
The credibility of journalism	19	63.2	26.3
Average working hours of journalists	20	55.0	10.0
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	21	52.4	19.0
Time available for researching stories	20	35.0	30.0

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in the UAE. 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"
Social media	131	64.9	31.3
Audience feedback	127	61.4	25.2
User-generated contents, such as blogs	120	60.8	25.8
Audience involvement in news production	128	59.4	25.8
Competition	133	59.4	30.1
Advertising considerations	120	55.8	30.0
Audience research	119	55.5	27.7
Journalism education	136	55.1	29.4
Public relations	120	54.2	30.0
Pressure toward sensational news	123	53.7	31.7
Profit making pressures	105	53.3	27.6
Ethical standards	137	51.1	31.4
Western ways of practicing journalism	119	45.4	33.6

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

### Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	600 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	simple random sampling for newsrooms and simply random for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	237 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face to face, mail/e-mail and online
<i>Response rate:</i>	70.0%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	01/2013-05/2015