



Sauti za Waandishi: Journalists' voices

A survey of Tanzanian media practitioners

1. Introduction

Journalists play a major role in society. At its best, the media keeps citizens informed about significant events and developments, acts as a watchdog to hold those with power to account, plays host to the national conversation, and offers a platform (and microphone) for citizens to make their voices heard – with journalists at the centre of all of this. The experiences and opinions of journalists are therefore of particular importance.

What kind of employment status do journalists have? Do they feel like they can make a decent living, and are they satisfied with their careers? How often do they experience threats and harassment as a result of their work, and who from? How do they feel about media freedom in principle, and in practice? And what expectations do

they have for the future of their profession in Tanzania?

This brief presents findings from a survey of 1,202 practising journalists, editors and bloggers in Tanzania¹. The panel was formed from the membership databases of various media societies, primarily the Union of Tanzanian Press Clubs (UTPC), together with the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA), the Media Institute of Southern Africa Tanzania Chapter (MISA-Tan) and Jamii Forums. Interviews were conducted by telephone between September 23 and November 7, 2023.

Given the extent to which most journalists in the country are members of regional press clubs (and thus also UTPC), the survey can be considered as presenting a reasonable cross-section of the experiences and opinions of

1 For brevity the term "journalist" is used here to refer to all these types of media practitioners.

those working in the media in Tanzania².

Summary of main findings:

- Most journalists have less-permanent, less-dependable forms of employment
- Most journalists say it is hard to make a decent living from journalism
- Most journalists are satisfied with their current job, though most would not want their son or daughter to become a journalist
- Female journalists feel they are not always treated fairly compared to male colleagues
- Half of journalists report that they have been threatened, harassed or assaulted at some time
- Journalists point the finger at government officials as the main source of threats to their work
- Journalists strongly claim to check the facts in their reporting, but many are willing to compromise in other areas
- Journalists are very aware of corruption within the media
- Journalists agree in principle that the media should be free from government control, but accept limits in specific situations
- Most journalists feel that the media in Tanzania does not have a lot of freedom to operate independently in practice
- Journalists see certain topics as off-limits
- Journalists see economic challenges as a significant constraint on the freedom of the media
- Journalists in Tanzania anticipate a lot of change in the coming 5-10 years, but they are broadly optimistic
- Most journalists expect the role of journalists to change, but not to decline

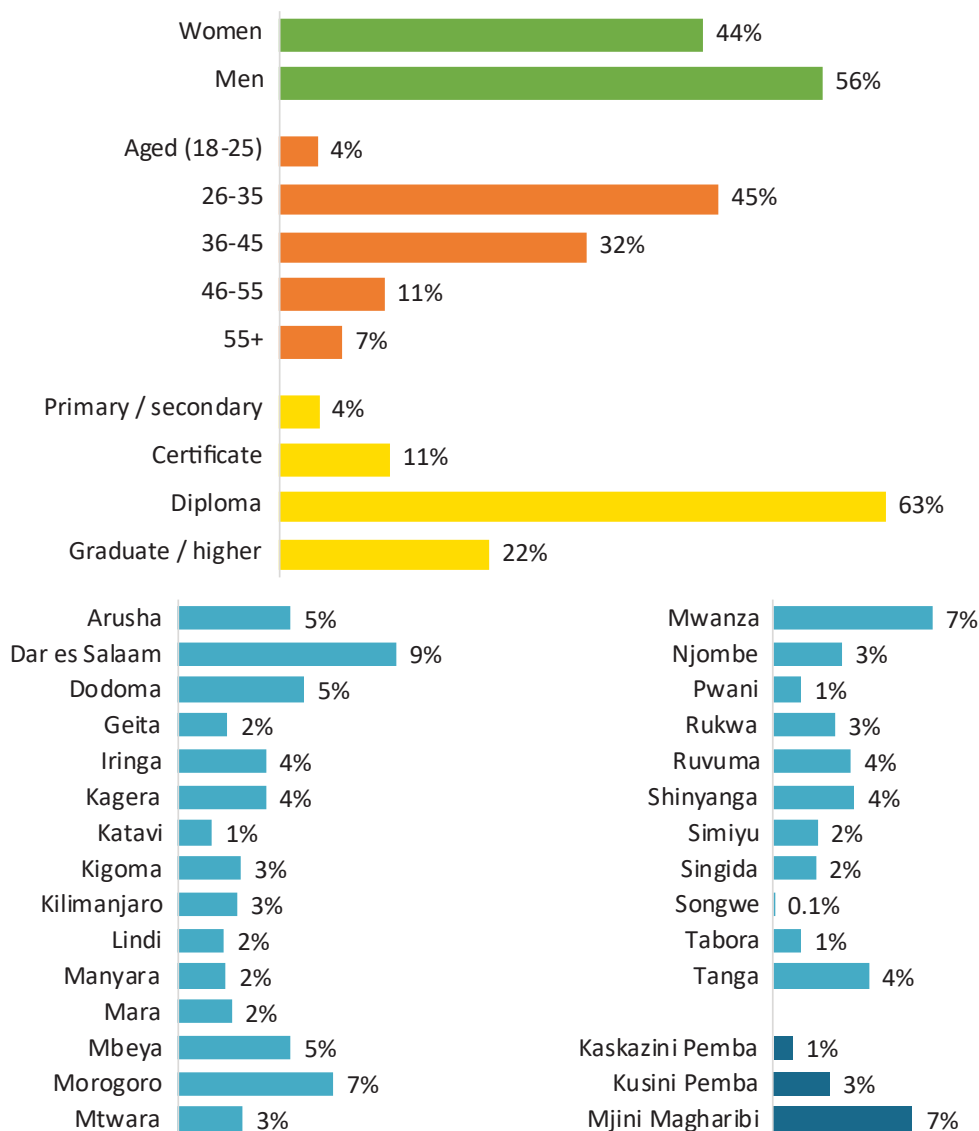
2. Fifteen facts on Tanzanian journalists' experiences and opinions

Fact 1. The panel represents a broad cross-section of journalists

The panel comprises more men (56%) than women (44%), which likely reflects the reality of men and women employed in the field. Few are aged 25 or under (4%), but half (49%) are 35 or under. Most panel members have some form of post-secondary education, such as a diploma (63%), graduate degree or higher (22%) or certificate (11%). Panel members are based in regions all across the country, including both the mainland and Zanzibar, as well as every mainland region.

2 Nevertheless, as the panel was not formed through random selection from a complete list of all Tanzanian journalists, it is not fully statistically representative of journalists and other media practitioners in the country, and should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Figure 1: Composition of the *Sauti za Waandishi* panel, including regional location:

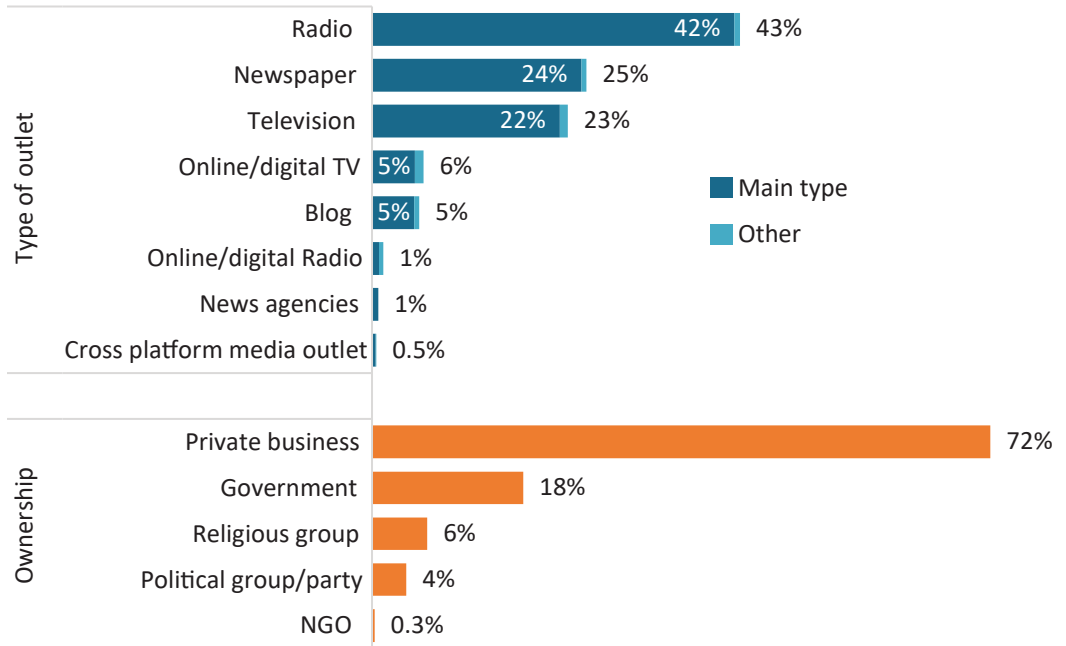


Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September–November 2023

Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Panel members cover the full range of media types, including both traditional and online. Radio (42%) dominates, followed by newspapers (25%), television (23%), online TV (6%) and blogs (5%). Further, they represent a cross-section of privately-owned and state media, though private media (72%) dominates.

**Figure 2: Which type of media outlet(s) do you work in? (multiple responses)
Who owns the main media outlet you that work at? (single response)**

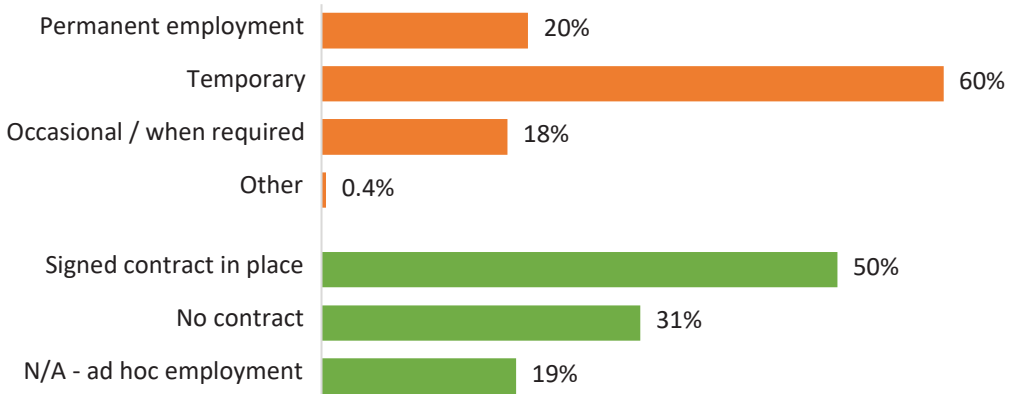


Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Fact 2. Most journalists have less-permanent, less-dependable forms of employment

Two out of ten (20%) describe their employment status as permanent, compared to six out of ten (60%) who say it is temporary and two out of ten (18%) who say it is occasional / as required. Half (50%) have a signed contract in place.

**Figure 3: In your main media outlet, how would you describe your term of employment?
Is there a signed contract / agreement in place?**

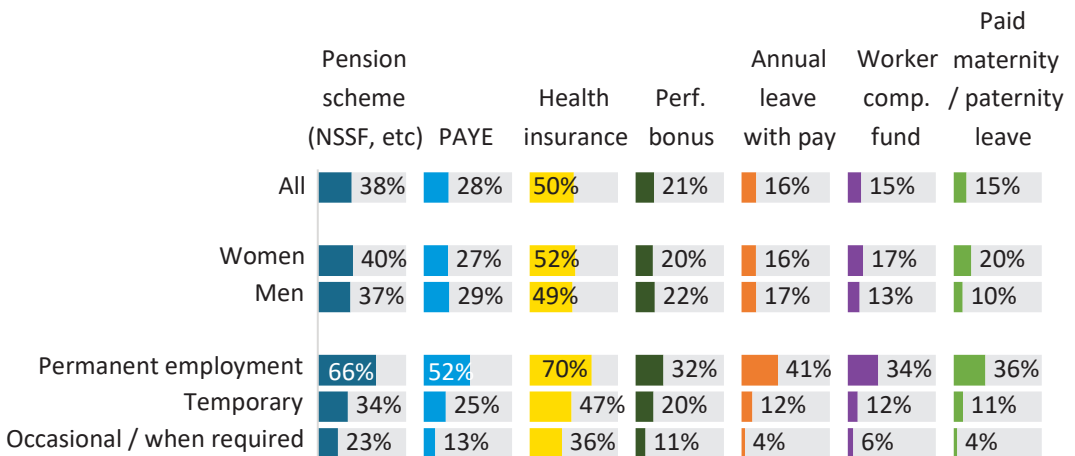


Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Many journalists do not receive employment benefits like pensions, insurance and paid leave. Half (50%) have some form of health insurance, four out of ten (38%) have a pension scheme and three out of ten (28%) are signed up to PAYE tax deductions. Fewer than two out of ten receive either paid annual leave (16%) or maternity / paternity leave (15%).

These working conditions are essentially the same for both men and women working in the sector, with the exception of paid maternity / paternity leave, where female journalists are more likely than men to receive this, though the number is still only two out of ten (20%) among women. However, those with permanent employment have substantially better employment benefits.

Figure 4: Do you have any of the following?

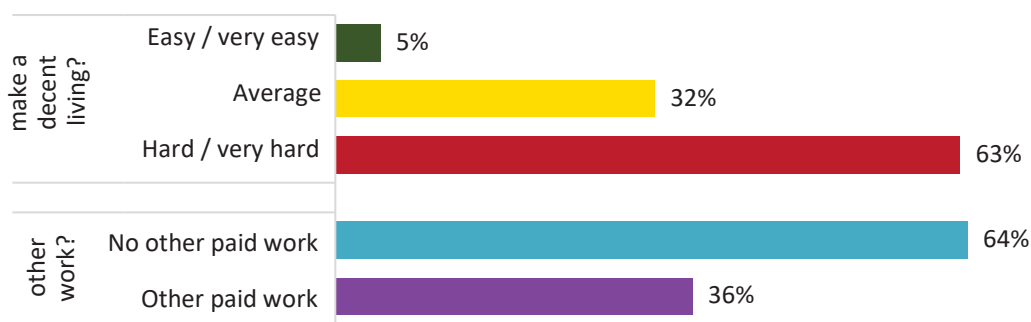


Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Fact 3. Most journalists say it is hard to make a decent living from journalism

Most journalists (63%) say it is hard to make a decent living from journalism, while very few (5%) say it is easy. One out of three journalists (36%) takes on other paid work besides working in the media – mainly running a business (22%; not shown in charts).

Figure 5: How easy or hard is it to make a decent living from journalism? Beside working in the media, do you have other paid jobs?

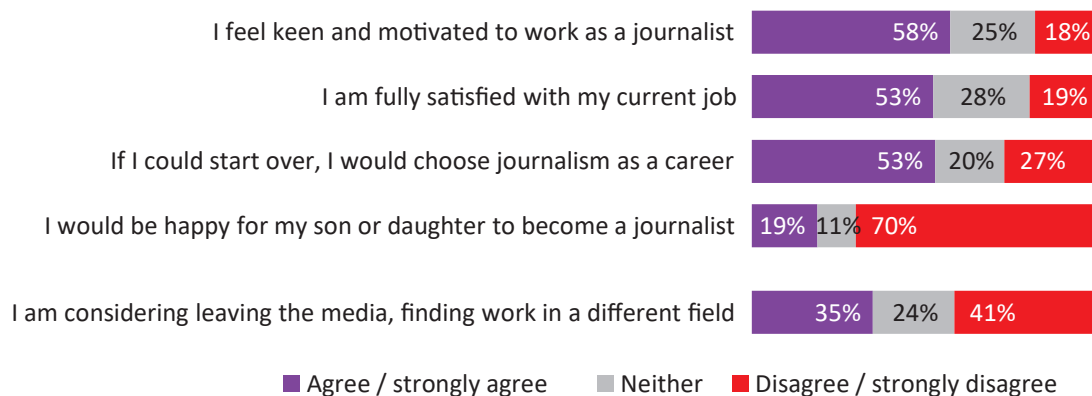


Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Fact 4. Most journalists are satisfied with their current job, though most would not want their son or daughter to become a journalist

Half of journalists (53%) say they are fully satisfied with their job, six out of ten (58%) feel keen and motivated to work in the field, and half (53%) would choose journalism again if starting out now. However, one out of three are considering leaving the media (35%) and just two out of ten (19%) would want their son or daughter to become a journalist.

Figure 6: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



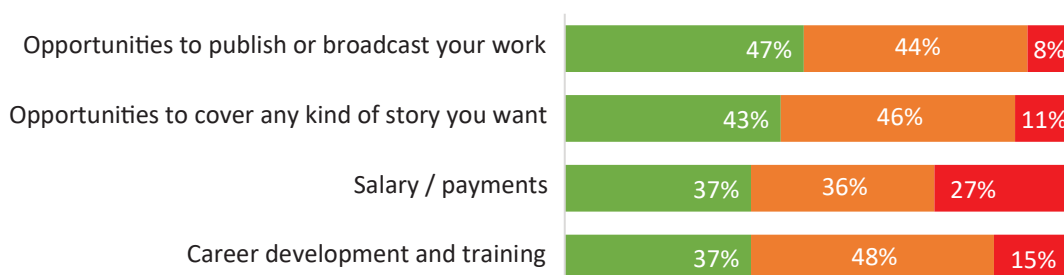
Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

More journalists say they chose the career because of the value it offers to society (61%) than chose it because it offers a good career (39%). (Not shown in charts).

Fact 5. Female journalists feel they are not always treated fairly compared to male colleagues

Most female journalists feel they are not always treated fairly compared to their male colleagues, particular when it comes to matters of money and promotion. They feel that their treatment is fairer when it comes to opportunities to cover particular stories or have their work published or broadcast.

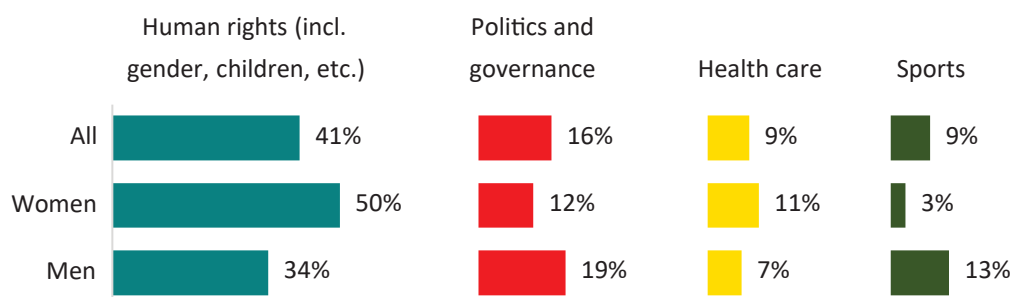
Figure 7: As a female journalist, how would you rate your treatment by senior staff in the following aspects, compared to your male colleagues?



Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
Base: female respondents (n=527)

Female and male journalists cover substantially different topics: more women than men are assigned to gender and health, men to politics and sport.

Figure 8: Which subject area do you mainly cover?
(single response)



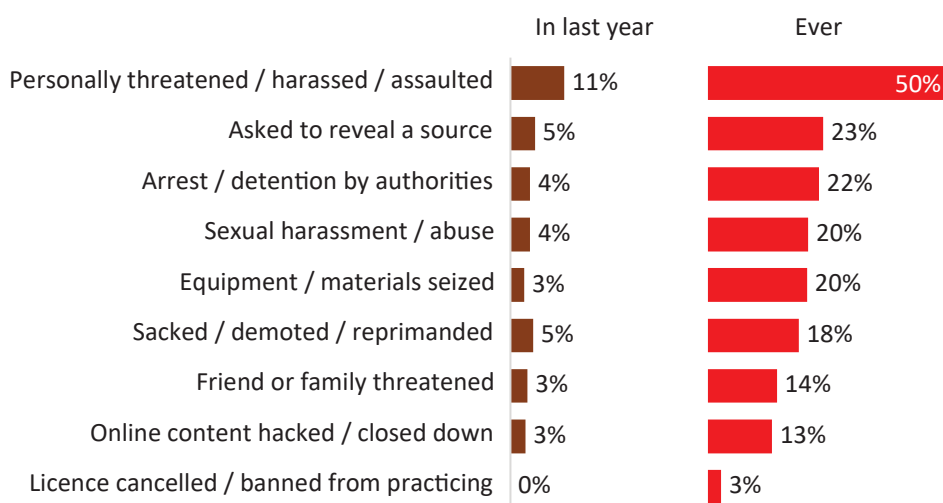
Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Fact 6. Half of journalists report that they have been threatened, harassed or assaulted at some time

Journalists' experiences of risk are widespread. Half (50%) report that they have been threatened, harassed or assaulted at some time, including one out of ten (11%) who have experienced this in the previous twelve months.

Two out of ten (22%) have been arrested or detained by the authorities, and similar numbers have experienced sexual harassment or abuse (20%) or have had equipment or materials seized from them (20%). A significant number (14%) have experienced threats against a friend or family member.

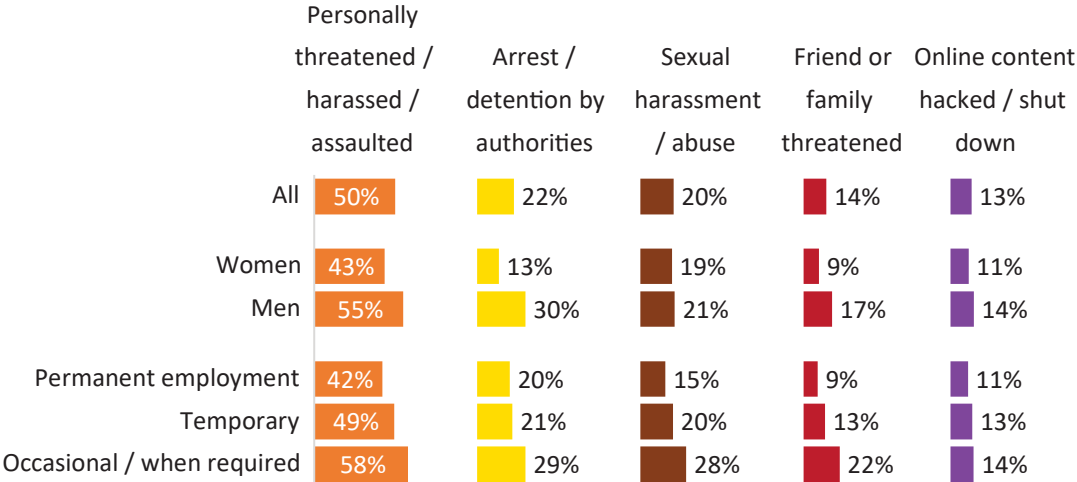
Figure 9: Have you personally faced the following, in the last year or ever, as a result of working as a journalist?



Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Male journalists report experiencing more harassment, threats, etc. than female journalists. (This may be linked to the different fields that they cover – see figure 8 above). Those in permanent employment report experiencing these problems less often than those in temporary or occasional forms of employment.

Figure 10: Have you ever personally faced the following in your work as a journalist?

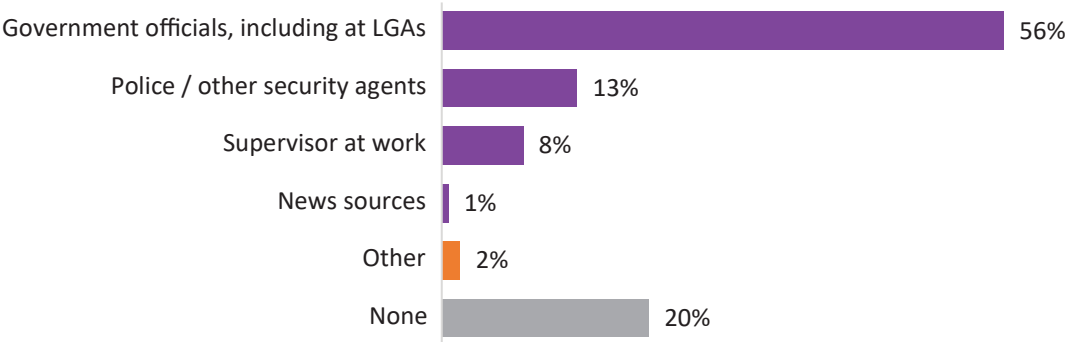


Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
 Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Fact 7. Journalists point the finger at government officials as the main source of threats to their work

Journalists overwhelmingly point the finger at government officials as the main source of threats to their work: over half (56%) say government officials are the main source of threats, well ahead of any other group. This is followed by police and other security agents (13%) and work supervisors (8%). Two out of ten (20%) report facing no threats.

Figure 11: Overall, what or who is the biggest source of threats to your work?



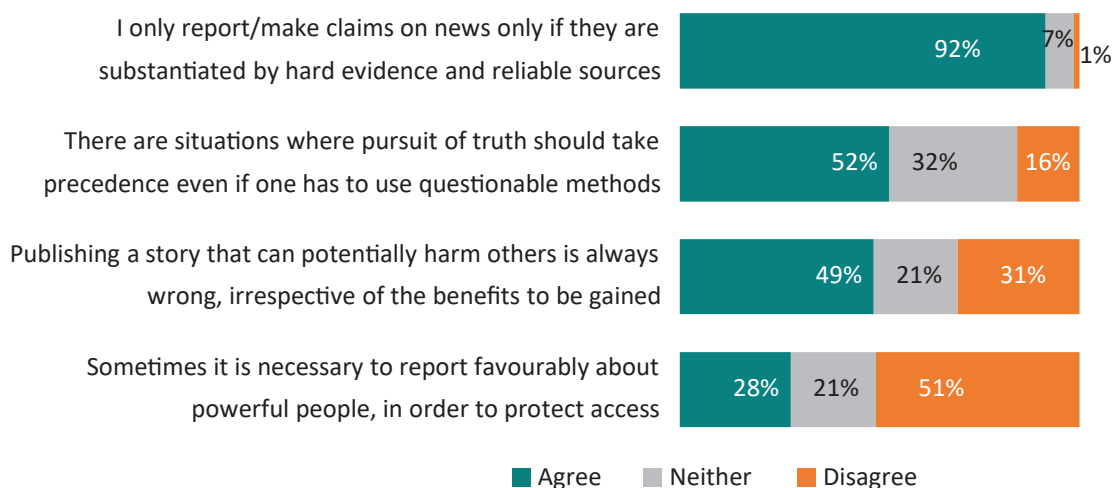
Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
 Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Most journalists (87%) say their employers offer no meaningful protections for their safety and security. (Not shown in charts).

Fact 8. Journalists strongly claim to check the facts in their reporting, but many are willing to compromise in other areas

Journalists strongly claim to check the facts behind their reporting – nine out of ten (92%) say they do this – but many are willing to compromise in other areas. Half (52%) say that questionable methods are acceptable in some circumstances, and three out of ten (28%) say it sometimes necessary to report favourably about powerful people, in order to protect access to them.

Figure 12: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

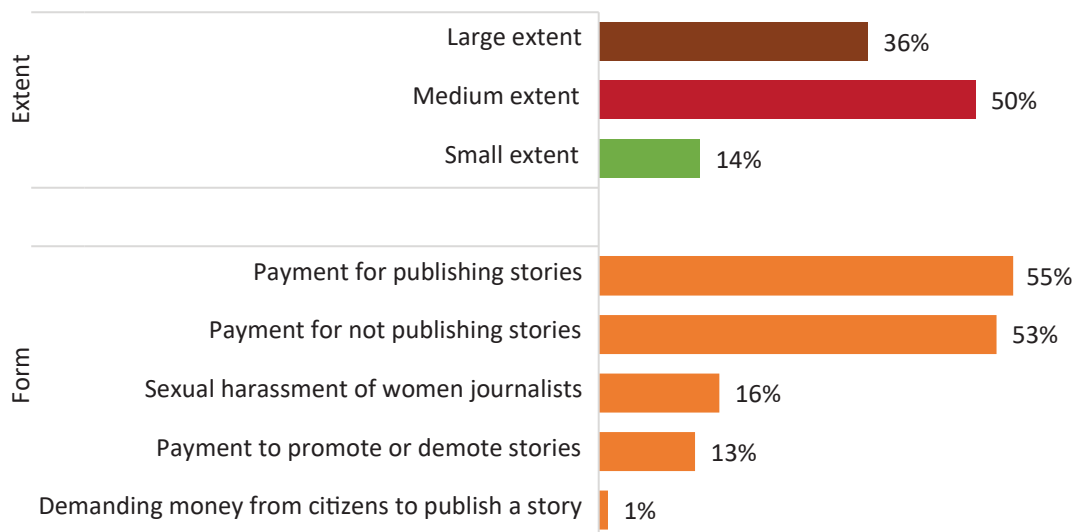


Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Fact 9. Journalists are well aware of corruption within the media

Almost all journalists (86%) say corruption exists in the sector to more than a small extent, including 36% who say it is widespread. The most common forms are payments for publishing (55%) or for not publishing (53%) certain stories.

**Figure 13: To what extent is there corruption/malpractice in the media in Tanzania?
Describe the type of corruption/malpractices:**



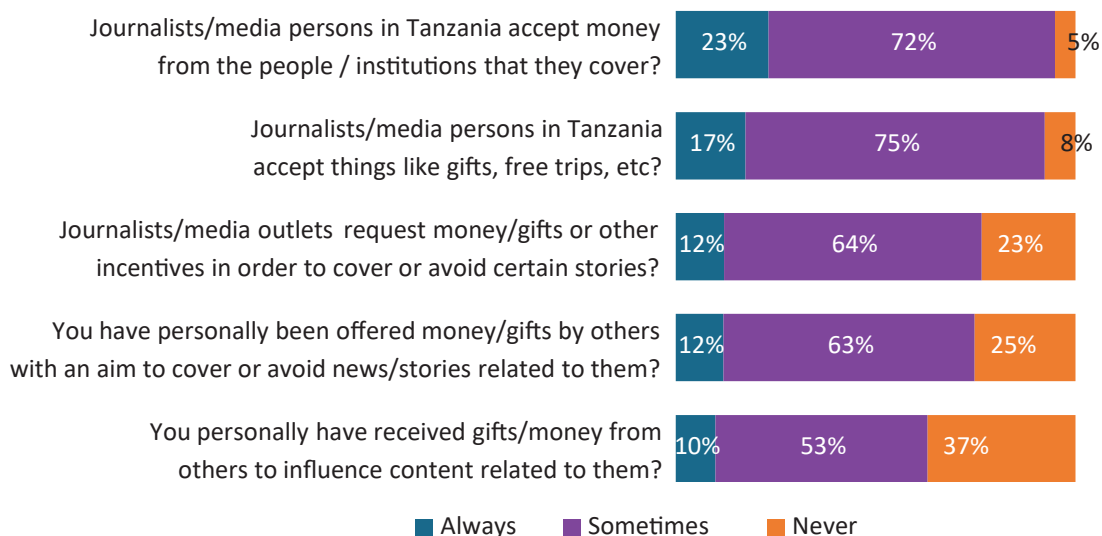
Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Almost all (95%) say accepting money from the people or institutions that are the subject of a story happens always (23%) or sometimes (72%). A similar number say journalists accept gifts, free trips, etc.

More than half (76%) say journalists sometimes request incentives in order to cover or avoid certain stories and a similar number report being offered incentives to cover or avoid a story.

One out of ten (10%) report having “always” received gifts and money in order to influence content, and a further half (53%) say they have done so sometimes.

Figure 14: How often, in Tanzania, do the following things happen?



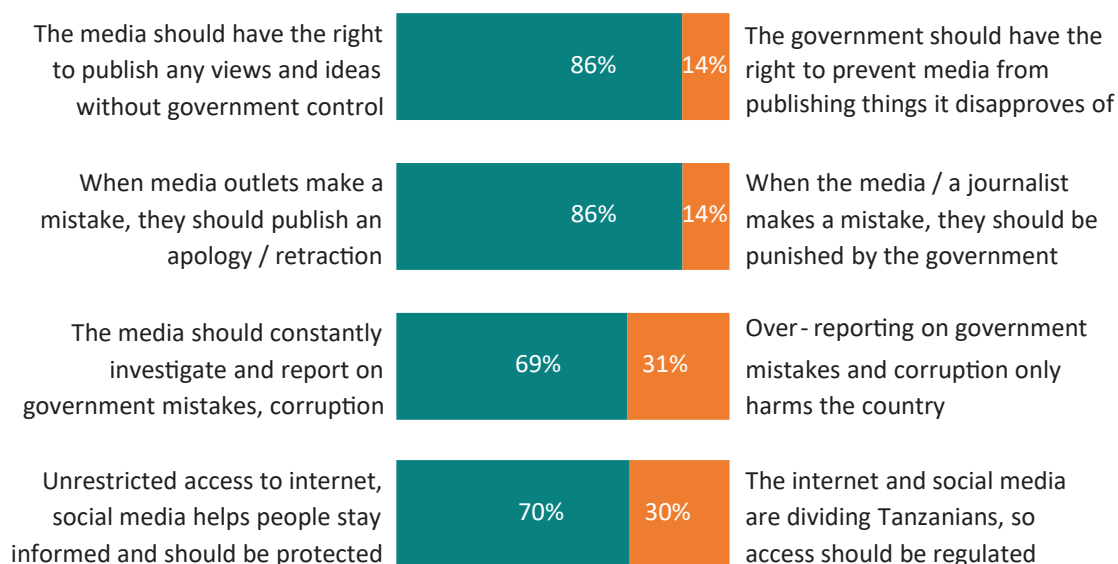
Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
 Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Fact 10. Journalists agree in principle that the media should be free from government control, but accept limits in specific situations

Journalists strongly agree in principle that the media should operate largely free from government control. A large majority (86%) prefer the statement that the media should have the right to publish anything without government control, while relatively few (14%) prefer the alternative statement: that the government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it disapproves of.

Similarly, a large majority prefer the view that the right response to an error is to issue a correction rather than for the government to penalise those responsible. And the majority see reporting on government mistakes and corruption as positive rather than something that undermines the country.

Figure 15: From each pair of statements, which do you agree with more?

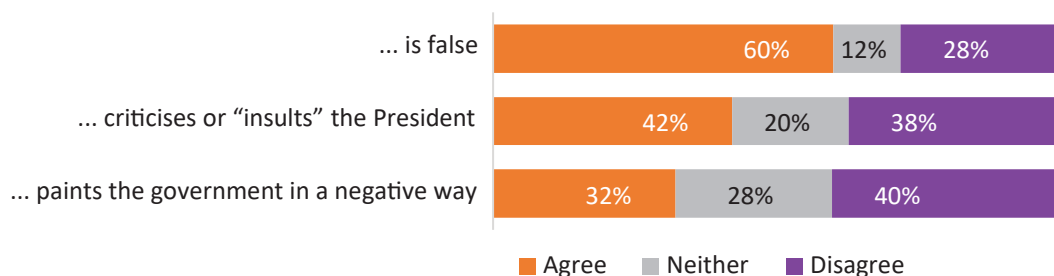


Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
 Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

However, journalists have somewhat mixed feelings about whether the government should be allowed to limit sharing of false, critical or negative information. For example, six out of ten (60%) agree that the government should be able to limit the sharing of news or information that is factually incorrect.

Similarly, four out of ten (42%) say it is appropriate for the government to limit criticism or insults targeted at the President, and three out of ten (32%) say it is reasonable for the government to limit publication of news that paints the government in a negative way. Only in this final case do more journalists see this form of government restriction as unreasonable than as reasonable.

Figure 16: Do you agree or disagree that the government should be able to limit or prohibit the sharing of news or information that ...?



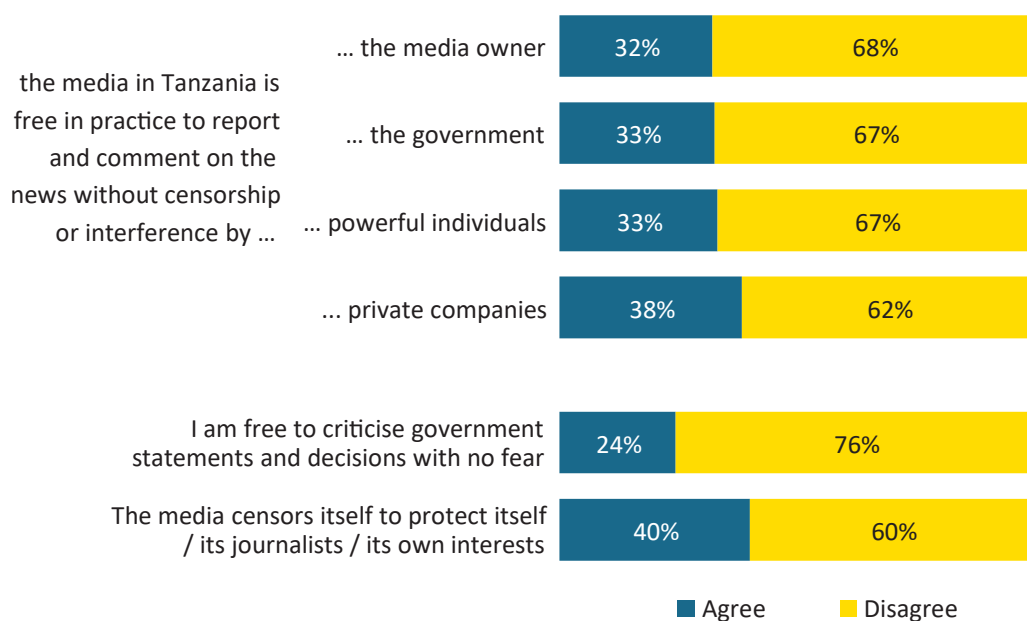
Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
 Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Fact 11. Most journalists feel that the media in Tanzania does not have a lot of freedom to operate independently in practice

A majority of journalists (62-68%) say the media is not free in practice to report and comment on the news without censorship or interference by media owners, the government, powerful individuals and private companies.

Similarly, a clear majority say they do not feel free to criticise government statements and decisions with no fear, and a substantial number (40%) say the media censors itself to protect its journalists or its interests.

Figure 17: Do you agree or disagree with these statements?



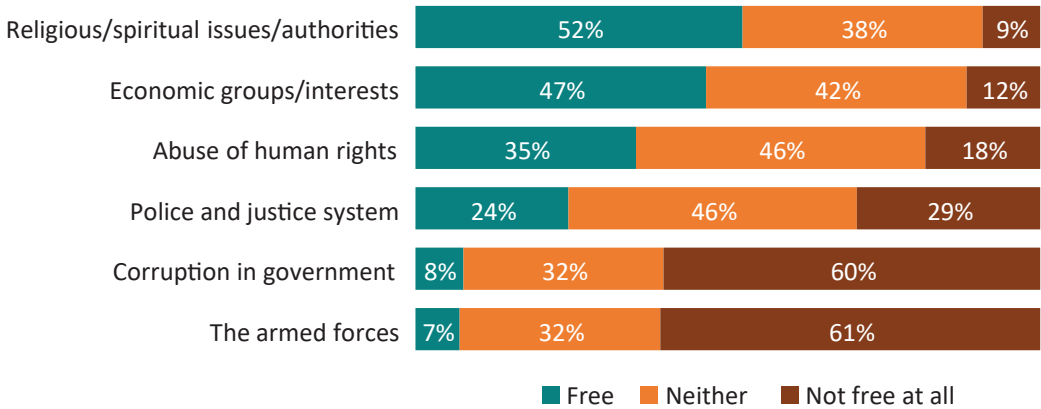
Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September–November 2023

Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Fact 12. Journalists see certain topics as off-limits

While journalists feel largely free to report on religious and economic matters, this does not apply to justice, corruption and the armed forces. Six out of ten journalists say they do not feel free at all to report on corruption (60%) or issues related to the armed forces (61%).

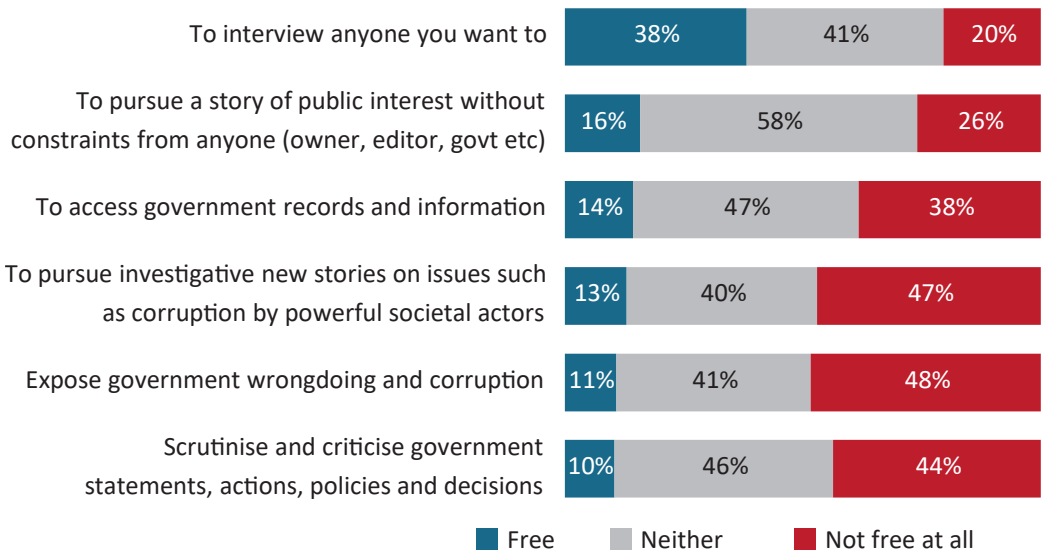
Figure 18: As a journalist, in practice how free do you feel to report on the following?



Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
 Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Journalists also do not feel free to follow up on sensitive stories affecting government and powerful individuals. Fewer journalists say they are free than not free to pursue stories of public interest, access government records, to pursue corruption-related stories, to expose wrongdoing by government and to scrutinise and criticise government statements and actions.

Figure 19: As a journalist, in practice are you free to do the following?

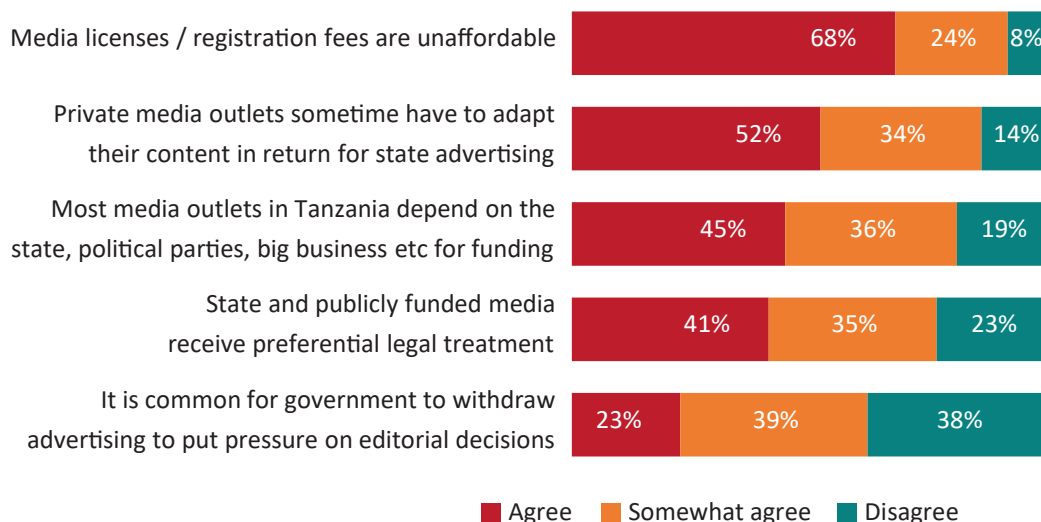


Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
 Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Fact 13. Journalists see economic challenges as a significant constraint on the freedom of the media

Seven out of ten (68%) agree that licenses and registration fees are unaffordable. Half (52%) say that media outlets sometimes have to adapt their content in return for state advertising.

Figure 20: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

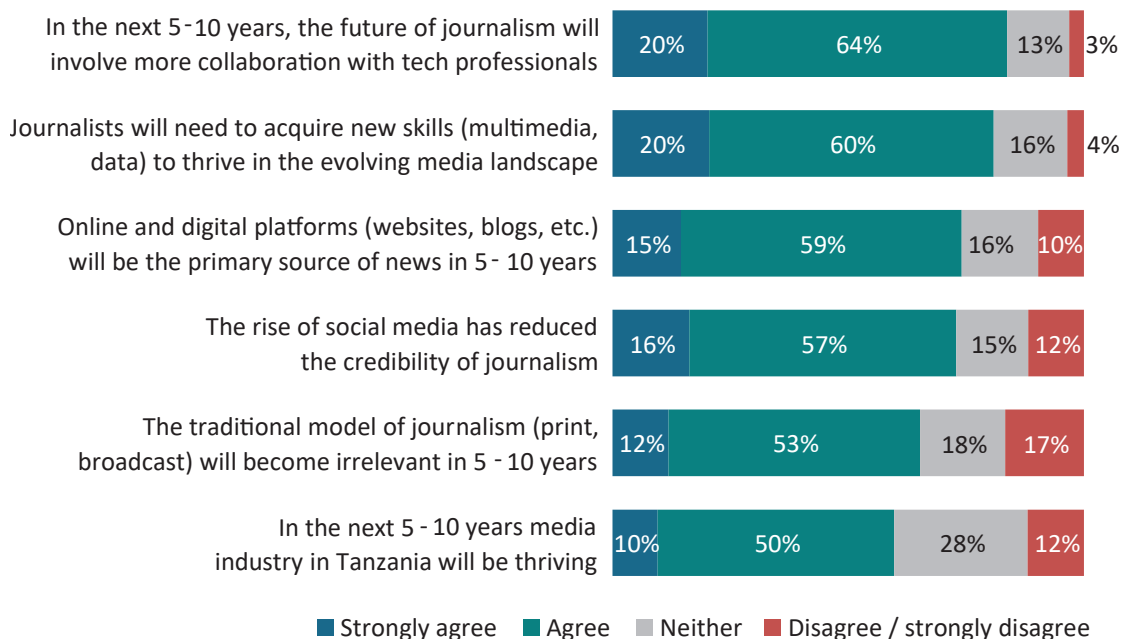
Fact 14. Journalists in Tanzania anticipate a lot of change in the coming 5-10 years, but they are broadly optimistic

Journalists in Tanzania anticipate a lot of change in the coming 5-10 years, but they are broadly optimistic about the future. Most agree or strongly agree that journalism will involve more work with technology professionals (84%), that journalists will need to acquire new skills (80%) and that online and digital platforms will dominate (74%).

Most agree or strongly agree that social media has undermined the credibility of journalism (73%), and that the traditional model of print and broadcast journalism will soon become irrelevant (65%).

However, most (60%) also agree that the media industry will be thriving in 5-10 years from now.

Figure 21: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

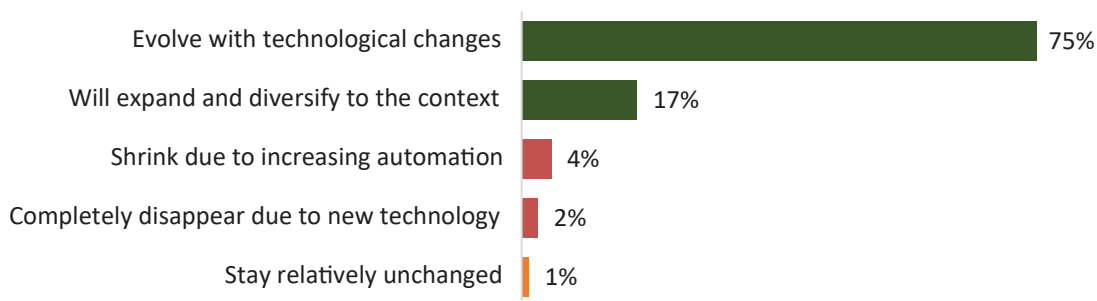


Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
 Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

Fact 15. Most journalists expect the role of journalists to change, but not to decline

Most journalists (75%) expect the role of journalists to evolve in the next 5-10 years, or that it will expand and diversify (17%). Few (6%) think it will decline or disappear, and even fewer (1%) expect it to remain unchanged.

Figure 22: How do you foresee the role of journalists evolving in the 5-10 years?



Source of data: *Sauti za Waandishi* survey, September-November 2023
 Base: all respondents (n=1,202)

3. Conclusion

This brief presents the findings of a unique survey in Tanzania that has gathered the experiences and opinions of journalists on a range of topics relating to their profession. Among all the detail, four key findings stand out.

First, it is clear that journalism – and the media sector as a whole – operates under tight financial constraints. Journalists overwhelmingly say that it is hard to make a living from journalism, and point to the many ways in which difficult business models limit the freedom of media houses to cover certain institutions or topics. And while most journalists are satisfied with their choice of career, they would not be very happy for their son or daughter to follow in their footsteps. To put this differently, journalists see journalism as a reasonable career, but not an ideal one; a path for someone who is realistic about the opportunities open to them rather than for someone with ambitions and dreams.

Second, journalists are very honest about the fact that corruption and unethical practices are widespread within the media. In part, this relates to the first point: if the only way a journalist can afford to cover an event is to accept transport, expenses and even money from the organisers, it is almost inevitable that their reporting will be affected. Or as a more extreme example, someone who is struggling to make a sufficient living to cover their household needs will be more vulnerable to pressure from someone powerful in order to write a positive story or drop a negative one. Editors and media owners are subject to similar pressures, or may even themselves be the powerful people exerting pressure on their newsroom journalists.

Third, journalists clearly perceive other limits on their freedom beyond economic factors. They point to limits effectively imposed by media owners, the government and powerful people, and highlight several topics that are off-limits to reporting. Further, while journalists are clear that, in principle, the media should be free to operate without government controls, when it comes to specific practical examples, they are much less certain. A substantial minority even say it is okay for the government to restrict publication of anything that paints the government in a negative way. Is this a case of journalists accepting that this is the reality of the context they are working in, or do they truly see such things as acceptable?

Finally, the extent of journalists experience of risks and threats in their work is alarming. Half have been threatened, harassed or assaulted at some point, including many in the previous year, and significant numbers have been arrested or detained, suffered sexual harassment or had equipment or materials seized. They point clearly to government authorities as the main source of threats to their work. Worryingly, they report that their employers offer very little to protect them against the risks they face, although it is worth noting those with permanent employment contracts appear to suffer fewer threats and harassment – simply having higher status appears to offer some protection.

Pulling this all together, we have a clear picture of journalism in Tanzania as a difficult profession. Journalists see value to society in what they do, but also see very clearly the constraints – economic, security-related, political, legal, sociological – that limit their ability to offer that value in full.

In an ideal world, we would remove these obstacles and the media would be able to better fulfil its vital roles in society: informing citizens and holding the powerful to account. In the real world, we can recognise that these challenges are deeply embedded in power relations and economic inequalities that persist. As the saying goes, *news is what somebody somewhere doesn't want you to print, all the rest is advertising*. In other words, if something is worth covering, somebody – possibly somebody wealthy and/or powerful – doesn't want it covered.

Nevertheless, such stark realism should not prevent us from striving to create an environment in which the media and journalists are able to work more freely and contribute more effectively to the country. At the very least, this means ensuring that journalists are better-protected from threats and harassment. It should also involve offering them more secure contracts with better benefits. And it should involve ensuring that the law is on the side of the journalists rather than a tool by which the powerful can hide the truth. Journalists' role in society is essential; we must all do what we can to make their work that much easier.

