

Safety of Journalists Country Report

El Salvador

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Report Authors

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Journalism increasingly is being criminalized in El Salvador, resulting in an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty leading to self-censorship and limited freedom of expression. Since Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele—the self-proclaimed “coolest dictator” in the world—implemented a “State of Exception” in March 2022, the number of homicides and level of gang-related violence and extortion diminished significantly, even as disappearances and accusations of human rights abuses and violations of civil liberties increased. During this same period, reports of threats and harassment against journalists increased as the government began cracking down on freedom of expression. According to the Journalists Association of El Salvador (APES), reported cases of attacks and other hostile behavior against journalists went from 77 cases in 2019 when Bukele first was elected, to 467 in 2024. Digital violence and aggression against women journalists were particularly common. In November 2020, a report by the Special Commission for the Investigation of Harassment of Journalists found that the government had used public resources to commit various crimes against journalists, including workplace discrimination, arbitrary acts and telecommunications intervention, and press freedom had been restricted by harassing journalists on social media, preventing journalists from attending press conferences, using government institutions to arbitrarily audit media outlets, and indirect censorship. President Bukele, as well as the press secretary of the presidency and the president of the Executive Commission of the Port Authority were named as those most responsible for violating press freedom and taking advantage of their positions to denigrate journalists. The Pegasus spyware also was found on the phones of journalists from independent news outlets like El Faro and Revista Factum. Some El Faro reporters also were denied work visas and ordered to leave the country. In 2021, the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights issues protective measures for El Faro journalists, concluding that their rights were at risk and calling on the government to investigate harassment and threats against journalists. The government also has used lawsuits and criminal accusations of money laundering and other crimes to attempt to silence journalists. At least one journalist has been arrested, and journalists’ families also have been targeted with criminal accusations in retaliation for journalists’ reporting. Social media frequently are used to harass and denigrate journalists. Bukele often uses X to lash out at critical journalists and accuse independent media outlets of spreading disinformation, calling them “terrorists” and “mercenaries” and accusing them of defending and aligning themselves with gangs. The government also passed a law threatening journalists with prison for reporting on gangs. In response, at least two dozen journalists have gone into exile or moved and El Faro even moved its base of business operations to Costa Rica. Journalists also frequently admit to self-censorship.

Safety Index Scores

Overall Safety Score

57.06

Safety Dimensions

Physical Safety

50.86

Psychological Safety

59.51

Digital Safety

72.78

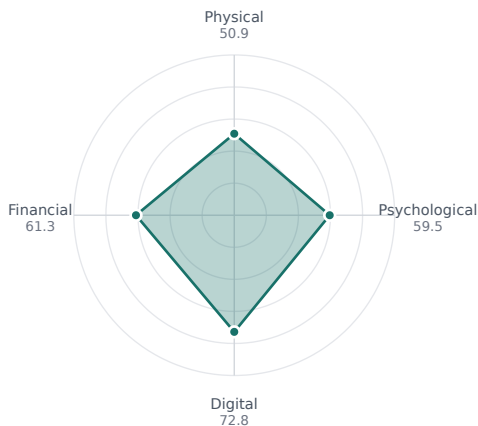
Financial Safety

61.26

Overview

The Safety of Journalists Index provides a comprehensive measurement of journalist safety across four dimensions. The charts below show how El Salvador performs across each dimension and highlight any gender-based disparities.

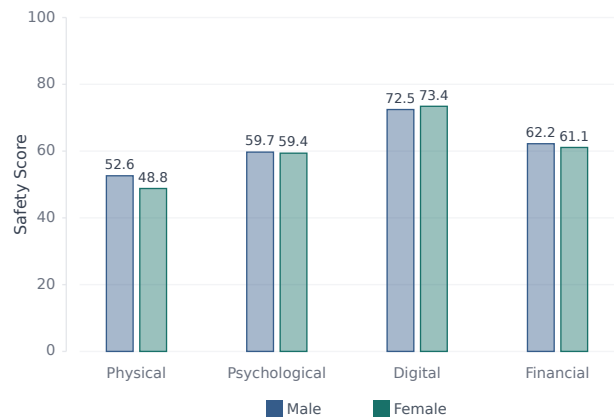
Safety Dimensions Overview



Safety Dimensions

This radar chart displays how the country performs across all four safety dimensions, revealing areas of strength and concern.

Gender Safety Gap by Dimension



Gender Safety Gap

This comparison highlights differences in safety experiences between male and female journalists, revealing potential gender-based disparities.

Physical Safety

The physical dimension carries **50% weight in the safety index**.

0

Journalist Killings

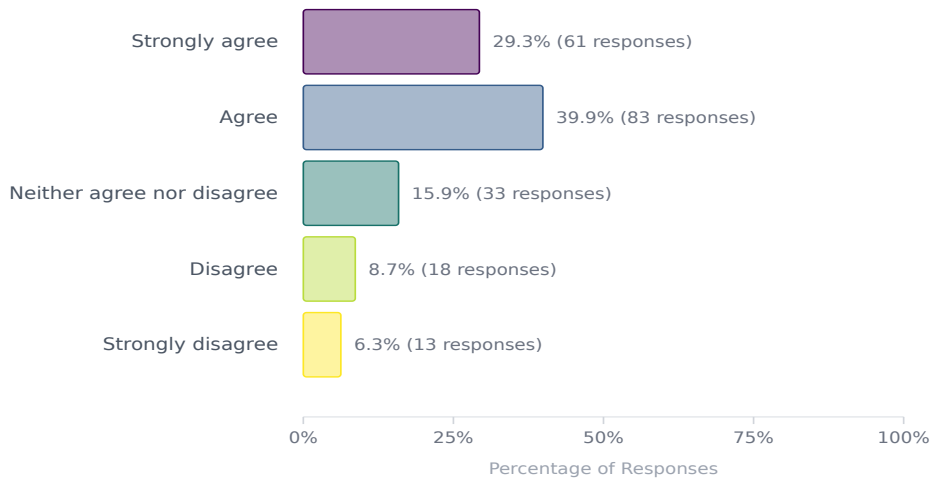
2016-2024

No journalist killings have been recorded in El Salvador between 2016 and 2024.

Note: This indicator carries 35% of the weight within the physical dimension of the Safety Index, making it the most significant factor in this category.

Data sourced from UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.

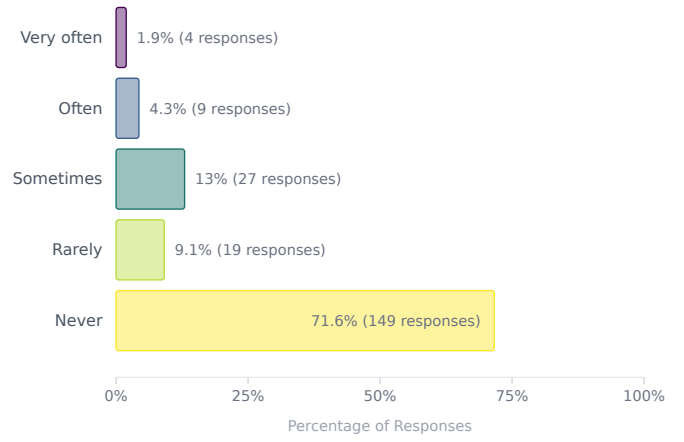
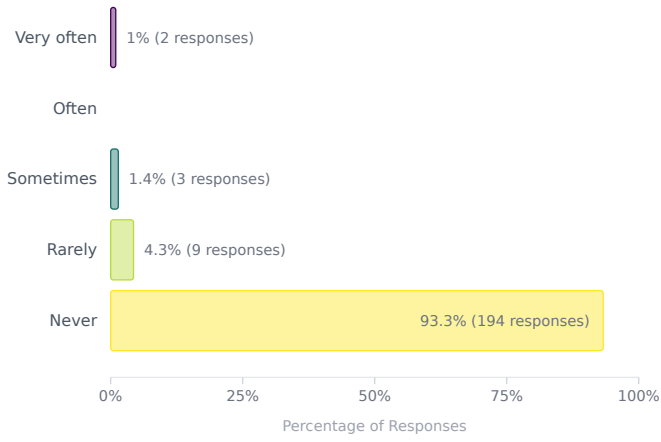
Responses to: "I am concerned about my physical wellbeing" (20% weight in physical dimension)



Responses to: "In the last five years, how often have you experienced any of the following actions related to your work as a journalist?"

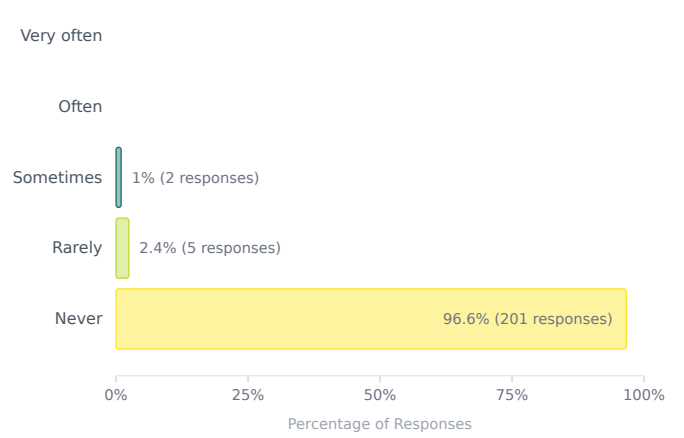
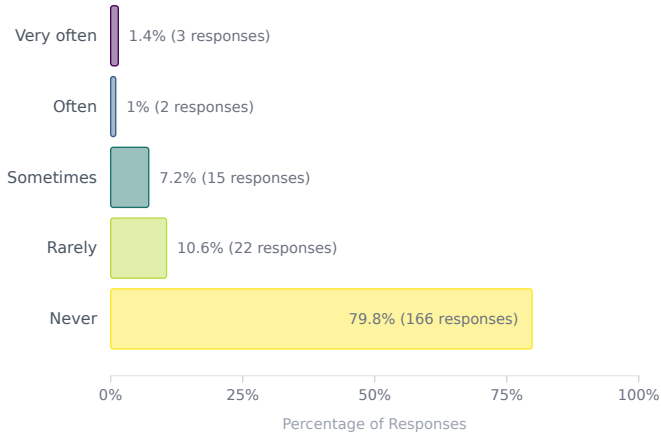
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment (15% weight in physical dimension)

Sexual assault or sexual harassment (15% weight in physical dimension)



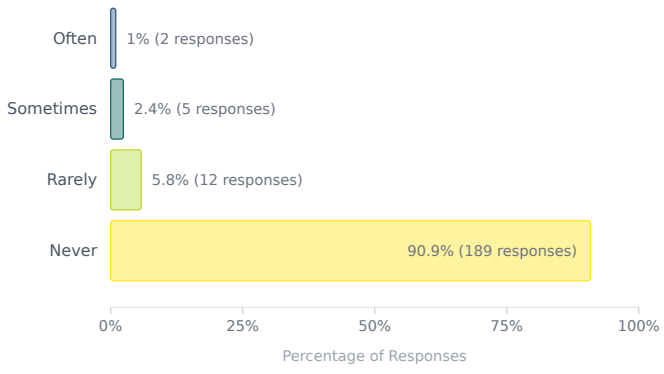
Other physical attacks (15% weight in physical dimension)

Abductions (did not contribute to calculation)



Office raids or seizures or damage of equipment (did not contribute to calculation)

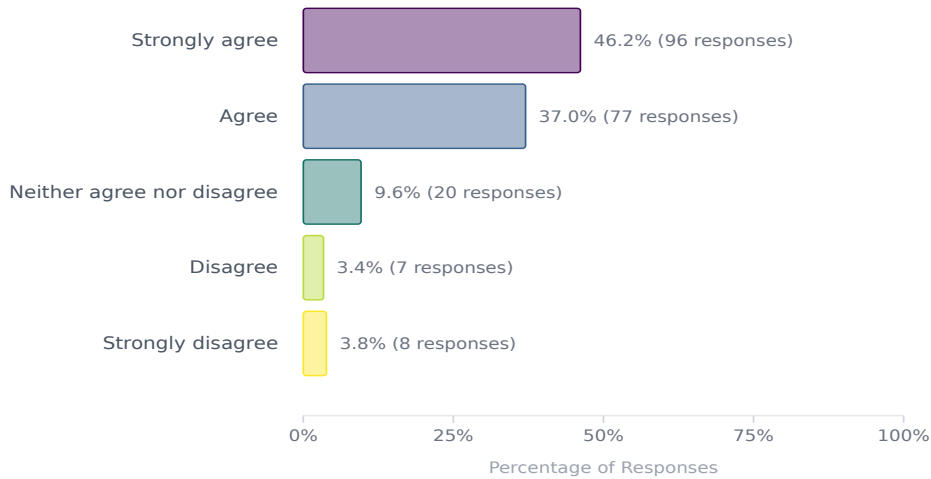
Very often



Psychological Safety

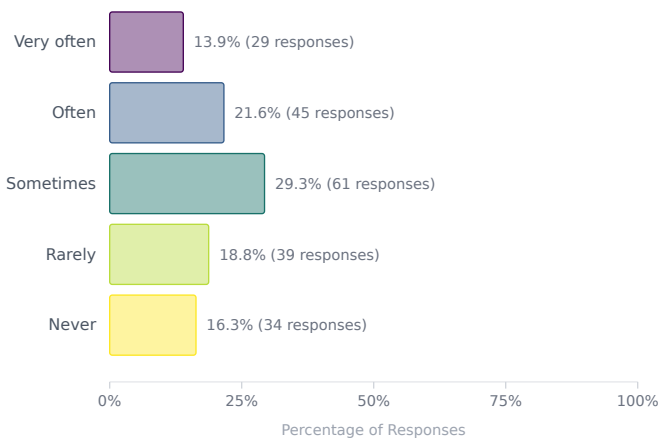
The psychological dimension carries **25% weight in the safety index**.

Responses to: "I am concerned about my emotional wellbeing" (20% weight in psychological dimension)

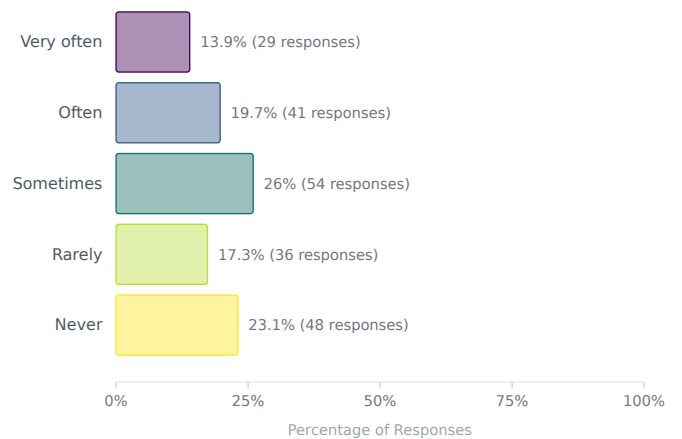


Responses to: "In the last five years, how often have you experienced any of the following actions related to your work as a journalist?"

Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you (16% weight in psychological dimension)



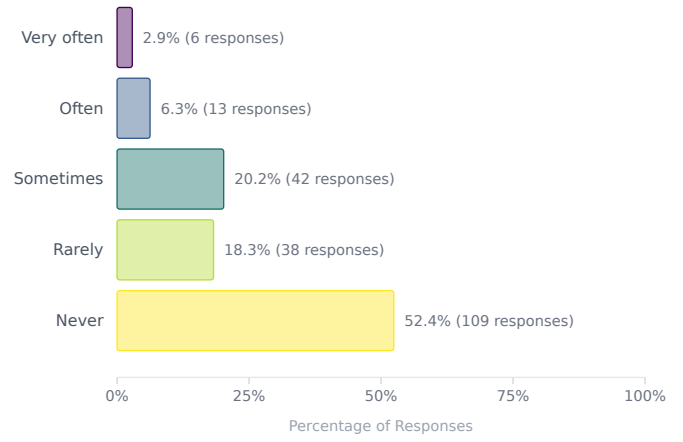
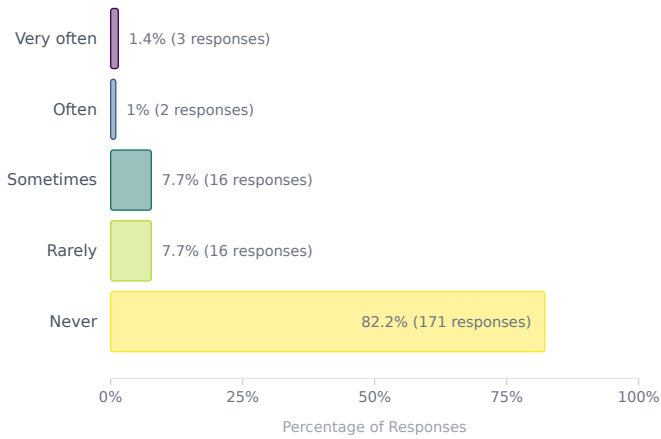
Public discrediting of your work (16% weight in psychological dimension)



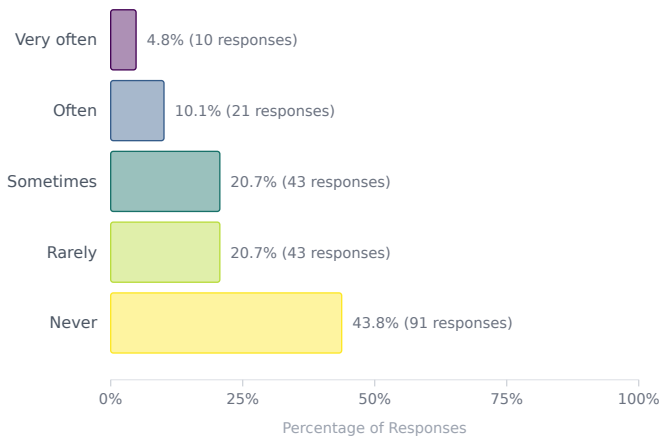
Legal actions against you because of your work (16% weight in psychological dimension)

Stalking (16% weight in psychological dimension)

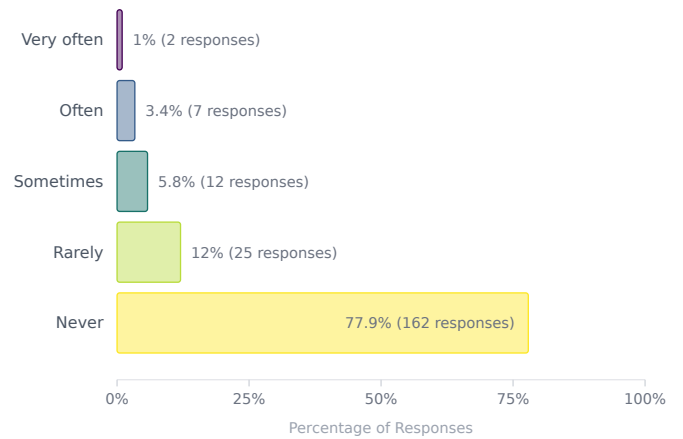
dimension)



Other threats or intimidation directed at you (16% weight in psychological dimension)

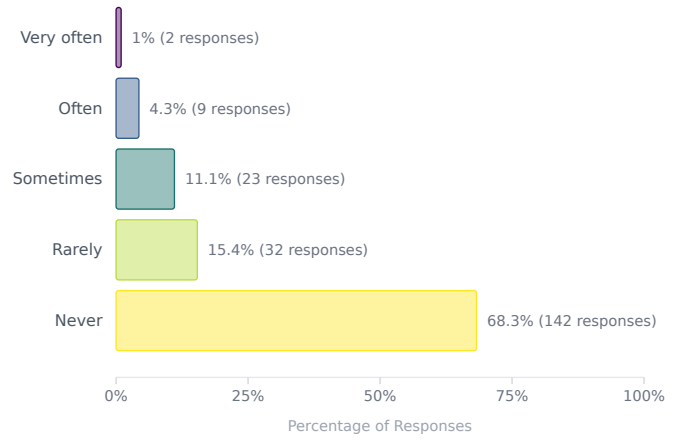
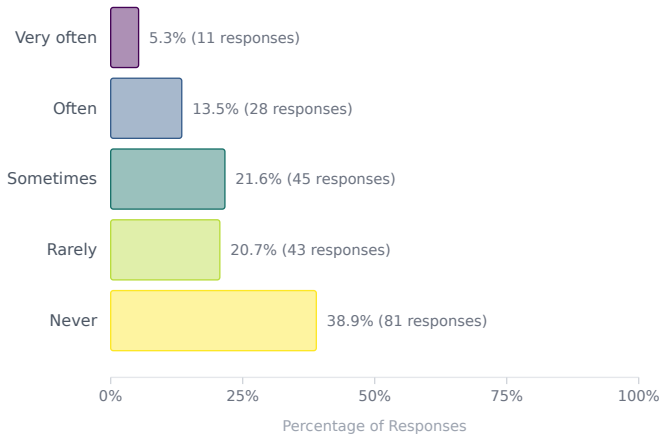


Coercion (did not contribute to calculation)

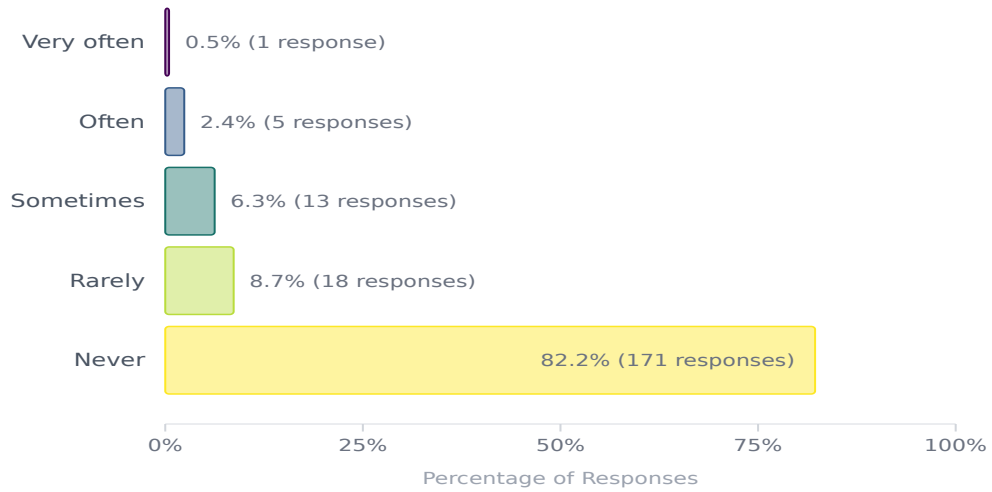


Questioning of your personal morality (did not contribute to calculation)

Workplace bullying (did not contribute to calculation)



Intimidation that targets your family or close associates (did not contribute to calculation)

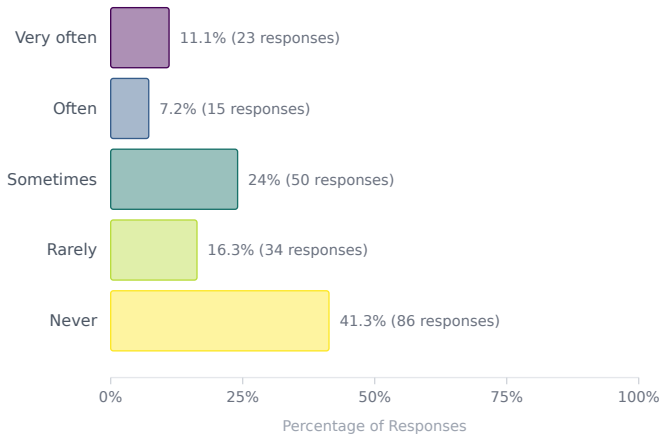


Digital Safety

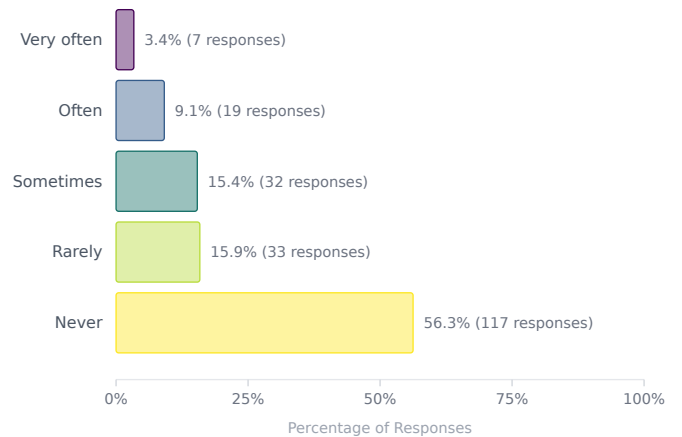
The digital dimension carries **12.5% weight in the safety index.**

Responses to: "In the last five years, how often have you experienced any of the following actions related to your work as a journalist?"

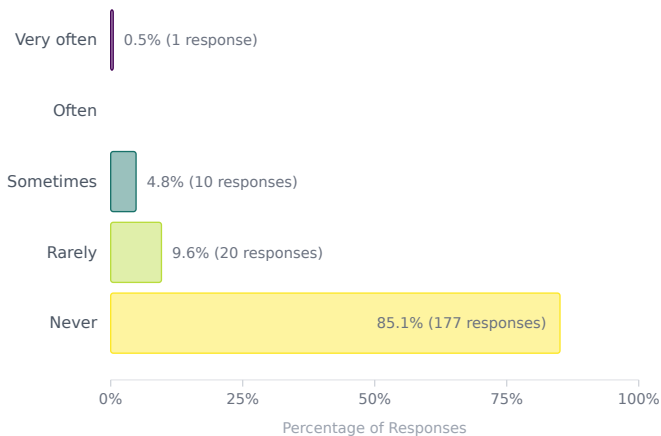
Surveillance (50% weight in digital dimension)



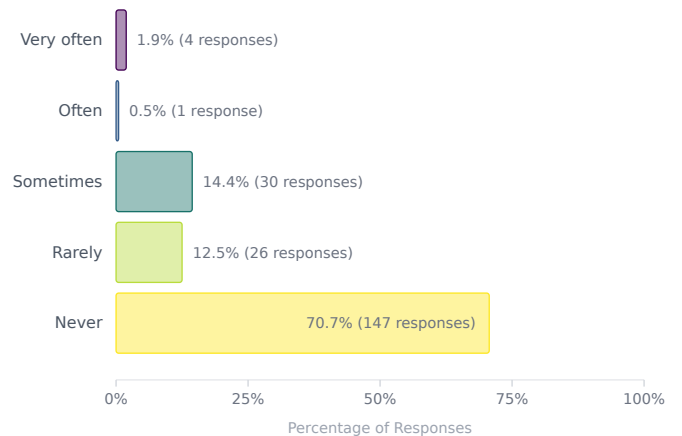
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites (50% weight in digital dimension)



Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories (did not contribute to calculation)



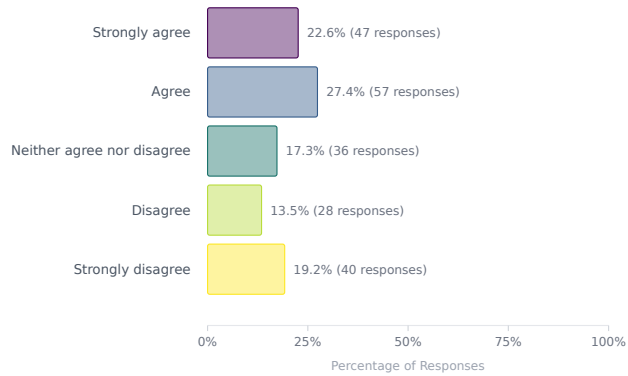
Others disseminating your personal information (did not contribute to calculation)



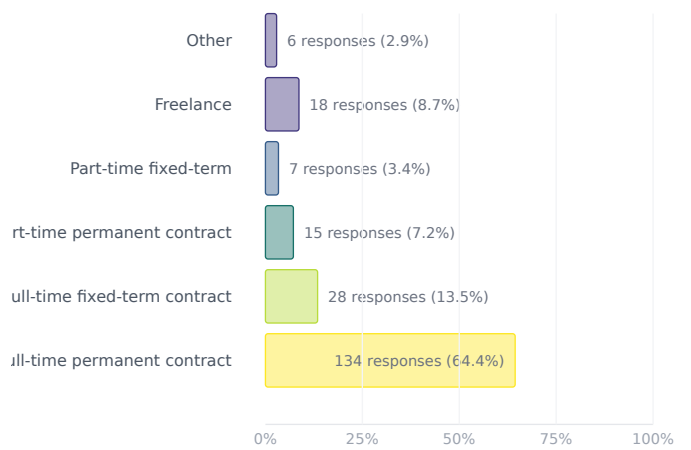
Financial Safety

The financial dimension carries **12.5% weight in the safety index.**

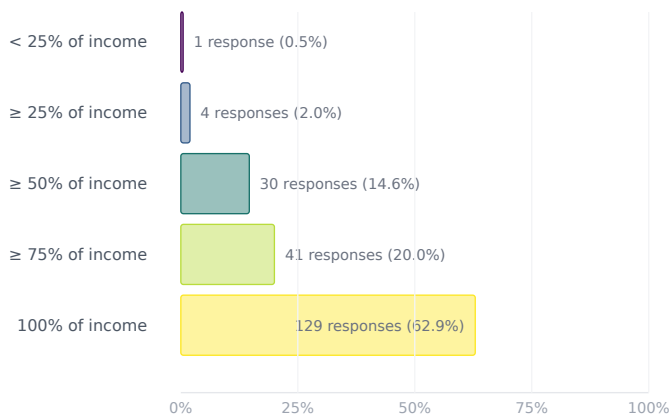
Responses to: "I am worried about losing my job in journalism within the next 12 months" (20% weight in financial dimension)



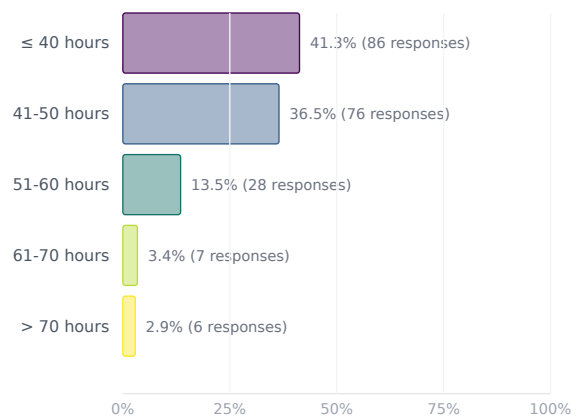
Responses to: "Which of the following categories best describes your current working situation as a journalist?" (20% weight in financial dimension)



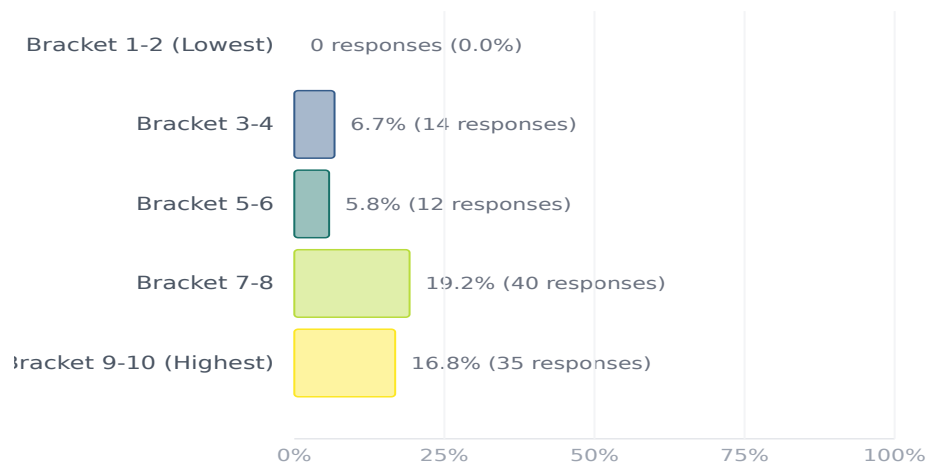
Responses to "Approximately what percentage of your overall work-related income comes from your work as a journalist?" (20% weight in financial dimension)



Responses to: "How many hours a week on average do you work as a journalist?" (20% weight in financial dimension)



Responses to: "In which of the following categories does your salary as a journalist fall?" (20% weight in financial dimension)



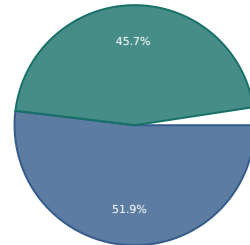
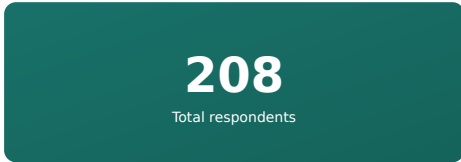
Options are given on a 10-point scale specific to each country.

Demographics

This section contains demographic information about survey respondents from El Salvador.

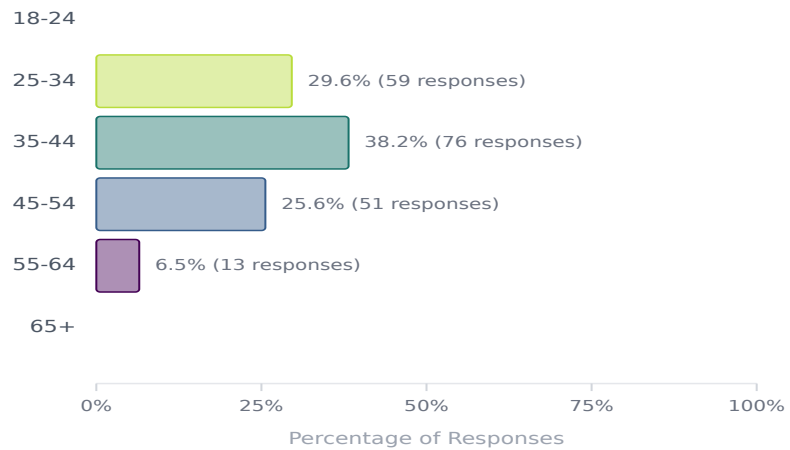
Gender Breakdown of Respondents

Survey Participation

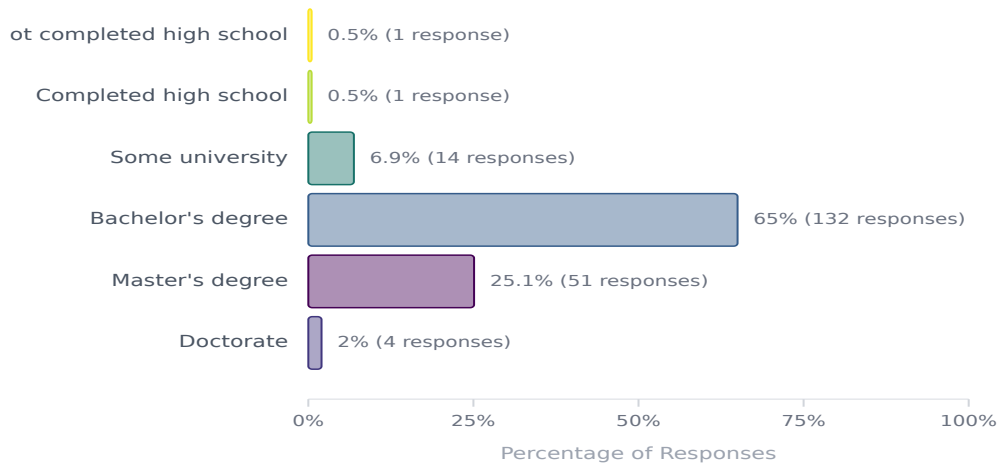


■ Male (108, 51.9%) ■ Female (95, 45.7%) ■ Other (0, 0.0%)

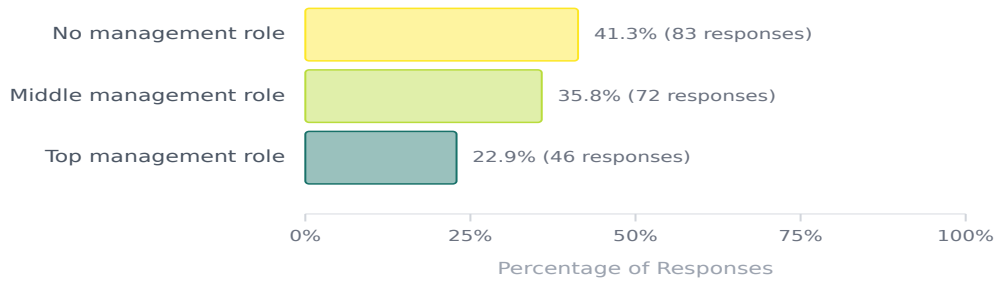
Age Distribution of Respondents



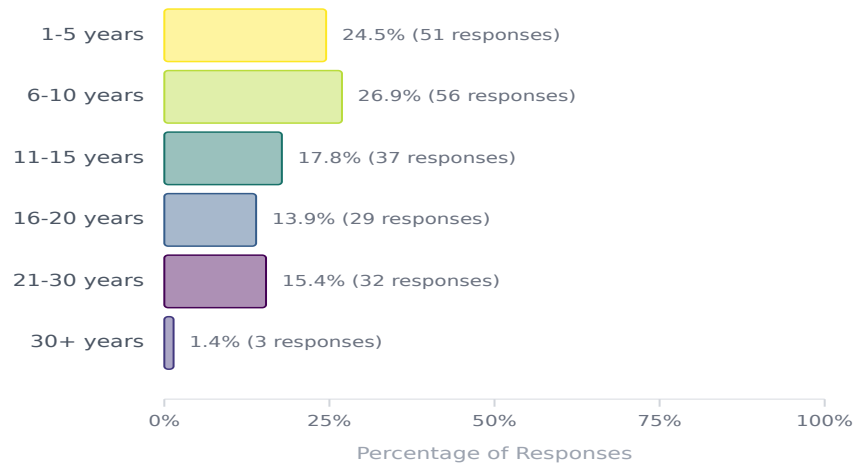
Education Level of Respondents



Workplace Position of Respondents



Years of Experience as Journalist



For more detailed information about the methodology and complete findings, please visit the full country page at: <https://safetyofjournalists.org/index/country/el-salvador>

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For more information, visit safetyofjournalists.org

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