

Women and Leadership in the News Media 2022: Evidence from 12 Markets

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Key Findings

In this Reuters Institute factsheet we analyse the gender breakdown of top editors in a strategic sample of 240 major online and offline news outlets in 12 different markets across five continents.

Looking at a sample of ten top online news outlets and ten top offline news outlets in each of these 12 markets, we find:

- Only 21% of the 179 top editors across the 240 brands covered are women, despite the fact that, on average, 40% of journalists in the 12 markets are women. Last year, the top-line figure was 22% across the same markets.
- Among the 51 new top editors appointed across the brands covered, 23% are women. In some countries (Spain, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US)), half or more of new top editors appointed in the last year are women, but in many others few or none are.
- In 11 out of 12 markets, the majority of top editors are men, including in countries where women outnumber men among working journalists. No market in our sample has a majority of women top editors this year.
- The percentage of women in top editorial positions varies significantly from market to market, from 7% in Brazil to 50% in the US.

- When we compare the percentage of women working in journalism with the percentage of women in top editorial positions, we find a weak positive correlation. Despite this, in 11 out of 12 markets, there are considerably more women working as journalists than there are women among the top editors.
- Looking more broadly at gender inequality in society and the percentage of women in top editorial positions, we find no meaningful correlation. Countries that score well on the UN Gender Inequality Index, such as Finland and Spain, have relatively few women among the top editors.
- There is notable variation in the number of people who get news from outlets with a female top editor. The percentage of online news users in each market who say they get news from one or more major outlets with a woman as the top editor (whether offline or online) ranges from, at the high end, 81% in Kenya and 80% in South Africa to, at the low end, 24% in Brazil and 5% in Japan.

General Overview

The 'who' in 'who decides what is news?' matters both practically and symbolically. The people who occupy top editorial positions in news media wield power and influence and are among those who come to represent both their specific organisation and

the industry as a whole. They shape what news and newsrooms look like (Griffin 2014) and play a role in how journalism is seen by audiences (Duffy 2019). Therefore, it is important to track who they are and document the extent to which they represent the wider public in all its difference and diversity.

One aspect of this issue is the gender of top editors. Scholars have shown, for example, that there can be differences in news coverage between newsrooms run by women versus those run by men (Beam and Di Cicco 2010; Byerly and McGraw 2020; Shor et al. 2015). More broadly, in this time of reckoning there is greater scrutiny of how the news media are doing in recognising and addressing many longstanding social inequalities, both externally and internally (Callison and Young 2019). In 2020, we started mapping the gender of top editors at a sample of major outlets across a range of markets to help facilitate this (Andi et al. 2020; Robertson et al. 2021). We continue that work here.

Our analysis complements important research conducted by others working on the status of women in the news media, including international reports such as the Global Media Monitoring Project's *Who Makes the News?* report (most recently, Macharia 2021), a report from Luba Kassova on the missing perspectives of women in news, work by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) on online violence targeting women journalists, nationally focused research (for example, from the American Society of News Editors Newsroom Diversity Survey, the Women's Media Center, and the recent UK *The Gender News Gap* report by Women in Journalism), and work by a range of academics (e.g. Carter et al. 2019; Eckert and Assmann 2021; Harmer 2021).

Methods and Data

Building on and extending our work from past years (Andi et al. 2020; Robertson et al. 2021), we examine a strategic sample of 12 markets with varying levels of gender equality, as measured by the UN Gender Inequality Index. We include the same 12 markets we covered in 2021, ten of which we also covered in 2020. To get an overview of global differences and similarities, we include a diverse selection of markets from multiple continents. To be able to leverage available data on the journalistic profession and on news and media use, we include 12 markets from

those covered in *Worlds of Journalism* (Hanitzsch et al. 2019) and in the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2021* (Newman et al. 2021). The 12 markets included in the sample are: Kenya and South Africa in Africa; Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea in Asia; Finland, Germany, Spain, and the UK in Europe; Mexico and the US in North America; and Brazil in South America.

In terms of data collection, our approach is identical to previous years. In each market we focused on the top ten offline (TV, print, and radio) and online news brands in terms of weekly usage, as measured in the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2021* (Newman et al. 2021). Our focus on the most widely used offline and online brands means that some important outlets with more limited reach are not included in the sample (in the UK, for example, the *Economist* and the *Financial Times*, both of whom have a female editor-in-chief, are not in the sample). Because of changes in the most widely used brands, and our focus on the top ten offline and online brands, there has been some turnover in the specific brands included in the analysis: 217 of the 240 brands covered in 2021 are included in the analysis again this year.

The data were collected in February 2022. We identified the top editor for each brand by checking their official webpages. We looked for the editor-in-chief or nearest equivalent, e.g. executive editor or head of news for TV. The exact terminology varies from country to country and organisation to organisation, but in most cases it is possible to identify a single person. We refer to the individuals identified collectively as the top editors. It is important to note that this, of course, does not imply that the top editor is the only person who matters, or even is always the most important person in terms of day-to-day editorial decision-making. For example, as Director General, Tim Davie is both the Chief Executive Officer of the BBC and its editor-in-chief, both offline and online. So here he is coded as the top editor for the BBC both offline and online, even though Deborah Turness has been appointed as the BBC's CEO of news and current affairs.

The individuals identified were double-checked by journalists from the market in question who have been Journalist Fellows at the Reuters Institute, as well as by academic partners and our researchers. In some cases we also contacted the brands or their press offices to confirm who is their top editor. Where organisations responded, we always deferred to their judgement. In some cases where an organisation has

not responded to our query and where there is no single, clearly designated editor-in-chief, or roles and responsibilities across online and offline parts of the same outlet are unclear, we have made a judgement call as to who to code as the top editor of the outlet in question. Gender is not binary, but as far as we are able to ascertain, every editor in the sample identifies as either a woman or a man. We coded observations as missing in cases where both online and offline versions of the same brand share a top editor. In 2022, the analysis covers a total of 179 individuals across the 240 brands included. Some top editors were stepping down at or around the time of data collection (for example, Martin Clarke at MailOnline in the UK and Phathiswa Magopeni at SABC News in South Africa). In these cases, where no replacement had been announced by late February 2022, we chose to keep the outgoing top editor listed as is, and we include here the top editor as of late February.

Findings

Based on this dataset, we find that 21% of the 179 top editors across the 240 brands covered are women. On average, this is substantially below the 40% of journalists in the 12 markets who are women. There has been significant change in many of the countries covered, but the top-line figure is one percentage point below last year's.

Looking exclusively at the 217 brands we covered last year that are included again this year, there has

been some turnover in top editorial positions, but how much varies greatly from market to market. In several markets there are few new top editors among the brands covered both this year and last, while a few other markets have seen greater turnover, especially Mexico and South Korea. Across the 217 brands covered in both 2022 and 2021, 23% of the top editors were women, down from 24% last year.

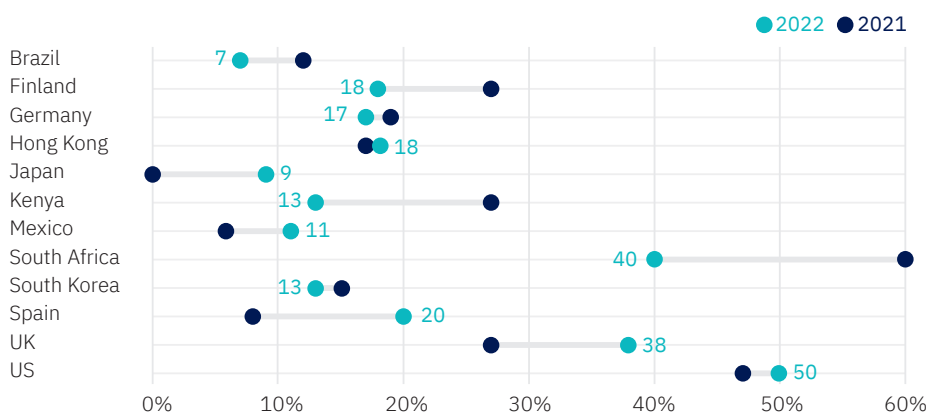
Of the 51 new top editors appointed across the brands covered, 23% are women. In some countries (Spain, the UK, and the US), half or more of new top editors appointed in the last year are women, but in many others, few or none are.

Despite the increasing industry focus on lack of diversity in the news media, we find no clear overall trend towards greater gender equality in top editorial positions over the past year.

As is clear from Figure 1, the percentage of women in top editorial positions continues to vary significantly across the 12 markets we cover. In Brazil, just 7% of the top editors among the brands in our sample are women (down from 12% last year). In the US, the figure is 50% (up from 47% last year). In 11 out of 12 markets, the majority of top editors are men.

Comparing 2021 and 2022 data, we can see that while a few markets have seen a growing share of women among top editors, several others have seen declines.

Figure 1. Percentage of female top editors in every market



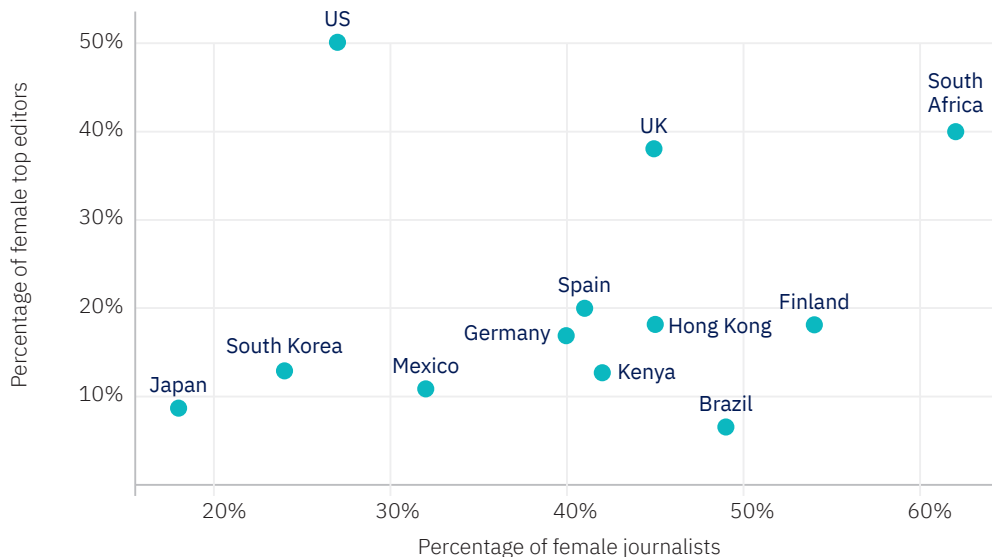
Source: Data collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the gender of top editors at 240 news outlets in 2021 and 2022.

In Figure 2, we look at the relationship between the proportion of women working in journalism and the percentage of women in top editorial positions, relying on data from *Worlds of Journalism* (Hanitzsch et al. 2019).¹ As in previous years, we find a (weak) positive correlation. As we have noted before,

correlation does not necessarily entail causation.

Despite this pattern, there are considerably more women working as journalists than there are women among top editors in all markets covered, except the US.

Figure 2. Percentage of female journalists vs. percentage of female top editors

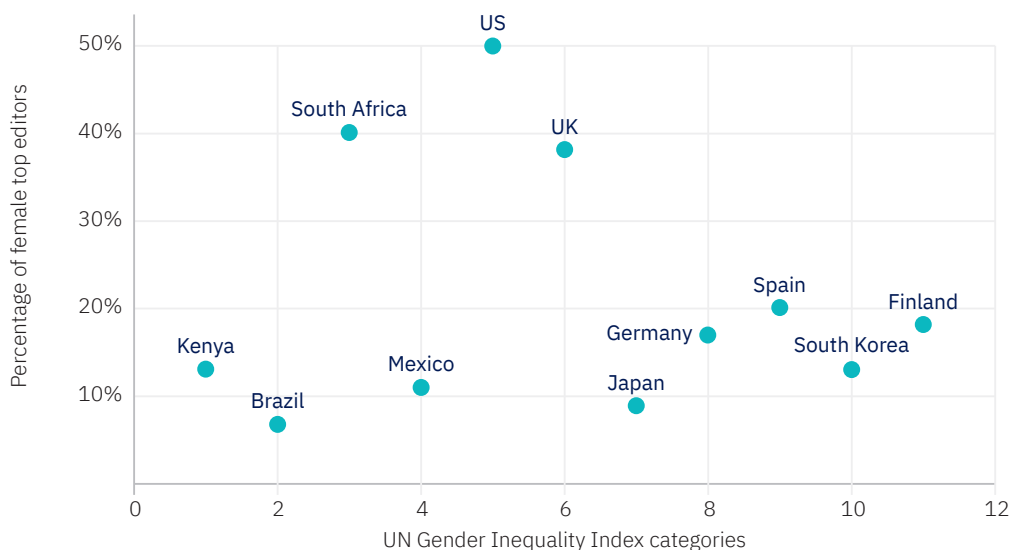


Source: Data on top editors at 240 news outlets collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Data on female journalists from *Worlds of Journalism* (2012–2016).

If we look at the percentage of women in top editorial positions in the context of data on gender inequality in society more broadly, relying on data from the UN Gender Inequality Index (2020), as shown in

Figure 3, we find no clear interpretable pattern across 11 markets (Hong Kong is not included in the UN Gender Inequality Index).

Figure 3. Gender inequality vs. percentage of female top editors



Source: Data on top editors at 240 news outlets collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Data on gender inequality from the United Nations 2020 Gender Inequality Index (UN GII), with categories scored from worst to best.

¹ The data from *Worlds of Journalism* (Hanitzsch et al. 2019) used in this analysis were collected from 2012–2016.

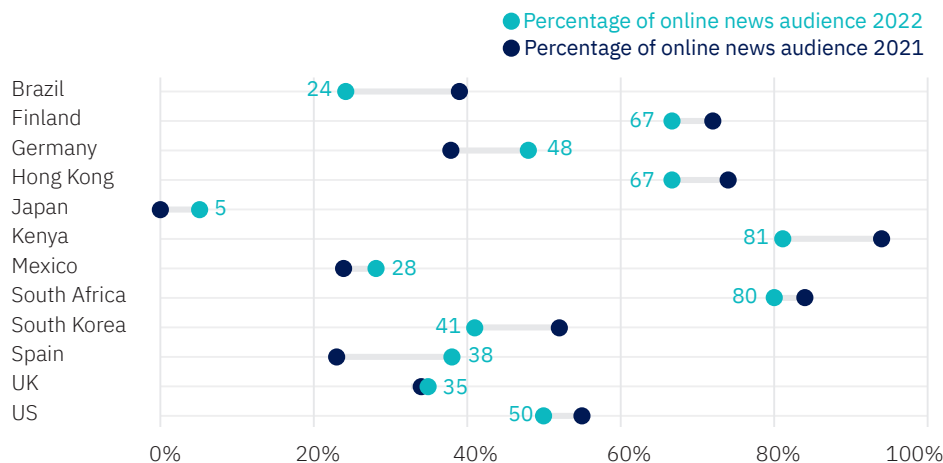
The continued absence of a positive correlation suggests dynamics internal to journalism and the news media influence both career paths and the gender composition of top editorial ranks, above and beyond wider structural factors. This has also been suggested by many country-specific studies, such as the UK's Women in Journalism report, *The Gender News Gap*. Several countries covered here illustrate that higher gender equality, as measured by the UN Gender Inequality Index, does not in itself mean more women in top editorial positions.

Finally, by combining the data collected for this Reuters Institute factsheet with data from the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2021* (Newman

et al. 2021), we can establish the proportion of people in each of the 12 markets covered who access news from at least one major news outlet with a woman as the top editor.

As Figure 4 shows, the share of online news consumers who say that they read news from at least one major outlet with a female top editor ranges from, at the high end, 81% in Kenya and 80% in South Africa to, at the low end, 24% in Brazil and 5% in Japan. This year, in the majority of the markets covered, less than half of internet news users have accessed news from at least one major outlet with a female top editor in the past week. The average across all markets covered is 47%, two percentage points down from last year.

Figure 4. Percentage of online news users using at least one source with a female top editor



Source: Data collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the gender of top editors at 240 news outlets in 2021 and 2022. Data on news audiences from the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2021*.

Conclusion

In this Reuters Institute's factsheet, we have analysed the gender breakdown of top editors at a strategic sample of 240 major online and offline news outlets in 12 different markets across five continents. We have found that the clear majority of top editors across the sample are men. Only one country has an equal number of female and male top editors. While there is a weak positive correlation between the percentage of women working as journalists and the percentage of women among top editors, there continues to be a lower proportion of women in top roles than women in the profession as a whole. This is in line with years of research documenting vertical segregation in the news industry (e.g. Franks 2013) and with many journalists' own sense that career progression in the profession is more difficult for

women than for men (as documented in, for example, *The Gender News Gap*). As in previous years, we find no clear interpretable relationship between overall gender equality in society and the percentage of women among top editors, underlining that there are specific dynamics at play in journalism and the news media.

While the last year has seen an increasing reckoning with the frequent lack of diversity in newsrooms, especially in top positions, we find no clear overall trend towards greater gender equality in top editorial positions from 2021 to 2022. Among the 51 new top editors appointed across the brands covered, 23% are women, two percentage points higher than the average across the whole sample but still a small minority.

So despite greater public focus on diversity, we find no significant evidence of change, at least at the level of top editors. Perhaps research suggesting many leaders in news media across the world believe their organisations already do a good job in terms of gender diversity – and findings documenting that many of them do not collect or make available data about their newsroom leadership and do not have anyone formally in charge of diversity, equity, and inclusion – helps to explain why practical progress in many cases continues to lag behind public declarations (Cherubini et al. 2021).

Prominent voices are driving an ongoing debate about diversity (and lack thereof) in the news media, and some organisations do collect and sometimes publicise data on their own individual track record. Media including the BBC, the *New York Times*, and the Televisa Group make at least some data publicly available, and others are part of the BBC's 50:50 Project tracking who features in their news. But most news media do not. Because it is important in itself to know who gets to decide what is news – and because such ongoing documentation can enable accountability and inform debates that some research suggests in itself can contribute to change (Eckert and Assmann 2021) – we will continue to repeat this analysis and publish new data in 2023 to track developments in gender equality among top editors across the world.

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Anne Schulz, Caithlin Mercer, Camila Mont'Alverne, Daisuke Furuta, Eduardo Suárez, Emily Chan Miu Ling, Emma-Leena Ovaskainen, Juliana Fregoso, Kirsi-Marja Takala, Luiz Boaventura Teixeira, Maurice Oniang'o, Nic Newman, and Sonho Kim for their valuable time, input, and feedback.

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