

Women and Leadership in the News Media 2023: 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 22% of the 180 top editors across the 240 brands covered are women, despite the fact that, on average, 40% of journalists in the 12 markets are women. In 2022, this figure was 21% across the same markets.
- Among the 38 new top editors appointed across the brands covered, 26% are women. In the United States (US) and Finland, half of the new top editors appointed in the past year are women, but in many other markets, few are.
- In all 12 markets, the majority of top editors are men, including in countries where women outnumber men among working journalists.
- The percentage of women in top editorial positions varies significantly from market to market, from 5% in Mexico to 44% 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 lower percentages of women in top editorial roles than women working as journalists.
- Looking more broadly at gender equality in society and the percentage of women in top editorial positions, we find a weak positive correlation. But it continues to be the case that many countries that score well on the United Nations Gender Inequality Index (UN GI) have relatively few women among the top editors.
- There is notable variation in 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). This ranges from, at the high end, 72% in Kenya and 71% in Finland to, at the low end, 18% in Mexico and 27% in Brazil.

General overview

Top editorial leadership matters both in terms of how journalism is practised and how it appears in society. Therefore, it is important to track who top editors are and document the extent to which they represent the wider public in all its difference and diversity.

One aspect of that is the gender of top editors. As Kassova (2022) writes in the latest of a series of important reports supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, ‘women are significantly underrepresented in editorial leadership roles and news coverage and their voices remain muted in a global news industry still dominated by men’.

Research documents some of the consequences that follow, including for journalists. Interview-based work in Brazil by Barão da Silva et al. (2022) finds that women journalists facing hostility online and offline attribute a frequent lack of organisational support from news companies in part to the ‘male-led structure of news organisations’. In South Africa, Rodny-Gumede (2022) outlines how discrimination hampers women’s entry into and progression in the news media, and in South Korea, Lee and Kim (2022) find that a masculine-dominant newsroom culture is one of the reasons why women journalists leave the profession.

It is important to continually monitor how the industry confronts gender inequality as part of an ongoing broader reckoning with how journalism and the news media handle and respond to different forms of inequity and injustice (Callison and Young 2019). Our analysis complements important research conducted by others working on the status of women in the news media and is based on our belief that it is critically important to continually document how the industry is dealing with issues of diversity and inequality. The self-styled watchdog will rarely watch itself. As Professor Meredith Clark said when she resigned from the US News Leaders Association newsroom survey because of the lack of willingness among media organisations to provide even the most basic data on their workforce, ‘You don’t get to transparency about diversity by relying on people’s goodwill’.¹

Instead, we collect data ourselves, continuing work we started in 2020 mapping the gender of top editors at a sample of major outlets across a range of markets.

Methods and data

Building on and extending our work from the past few years (Andı et al. 2020; Eddy et al. 2022; Robertson et al. 2021), we examine a strategic sample of 12 markets with varying levels of gender equality, as measured by the UN GII. We include the same 12 markets we covered in 2022 and 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 2022* (Newman et al. 2022). 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 2022* (Newman et al. 2022). 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 which have a woman as editor-in-chief, are not in the sample). Adhering to these lists also means that brands that include a mix of aggregated and original news content, such as Yahoo! News in the US, are included in the analysis if they are based in and widely used in that market. Because of year-on-year 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: 219 of the 240 brands covered in 2022 are included in the analysis again this year.

¹ <https://www.niemanlab.org/2022/04/crushing-resistance-yet-again-newsrooms-arent-showing-up-to-the-industrys-largest-diversity-survey/>

The data were collected in February 2023. We identified the top editor for each brand by checking their official webpages, press releases, and related news coverage. We looked for the editor-in-chief or nearest equivalent, such as 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. He is therefore coded here 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.

Names were compiled and double-checked in consultation with local partners within every market, including current and former Reuters Institute Journalist Fellows as well as academic experts. In some cases, we also contacted the brands or their press offices to confirm who is their top editor. Even then it can be difficult to establish who is in charge. Where organisations responded, we always deferred to their judgement. In some cases, where an organisation had 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 whom 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. To avoid double-counting, we coded one observation as missing in cases where both online and offline versions of the same brand share a top editor, as well as where two brands with the same ownership share a top editor. In 2023, the analysis covers a total of 180 individuals across the 240 brands included. Some top editors had publicly or privately announced they were stepping down at or around the time of data collection (for example, John Ryley at Sky News in the UK). In these cases, where no replacement had

been publicly announced by late February 2023, we chose to keep the outgoing top editor listed as is, and we included here the top editor as of late February.

Findings

Based on this dataset, we find that 22% of the 180 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 as the change is not always in the direction of greater gender parity, the top-line figure is only one percentage point higher than last year's.

Looking exclusively at the 219 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 (or no) new top editors among the brands covered both this year and last year, while a few other markets have seen greater turnover, especially Japan, South Korea, and the US. Among the 38 new top editors appointed across the 219 brands covered again this year, 26% are women. In the US and Finland, half of the top editors appointed in the past year are women, but in every other market the figure is lower. Across the 219 brands covered in both 2023 and 2022, 20% of the top editors are women, down from 23% last 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 Mexico, just 5% of the top editors among the brands in our sample are women (down from 11% last year). In the US, the figure is now 44% (down from 50% last year). In both cases, however, these declines are driven at least in part by changes in which brands we included in the analysis. In all 12 markets, the majority of top editors are men.

Compared with past years, we can see that, while half of the markets have seen a growing share of women among top editors, many others have seen declines, particularly in South Africa.

Figure 1. Percentage of women top editors in every market

Market	2020	2021	2022	2023
US	41%	47%	50%	44%
Finland	33%	27%	18%	36%
UK	29%	27%	38%	35%
Hong Kong	13%	17%	18%	27%
Germany	27%	19%	17%	20%
South Africa	47%	60%	40%	20%
Spain	–	8%	20%	19%
Japan	0%	0%	9%	17%
South Korea	11%	15%	13%	14%
Brazil	22%	12%	7%	13%
Kenya	–	27%	13%	13%
Mexico	6%	6%	11%	5%

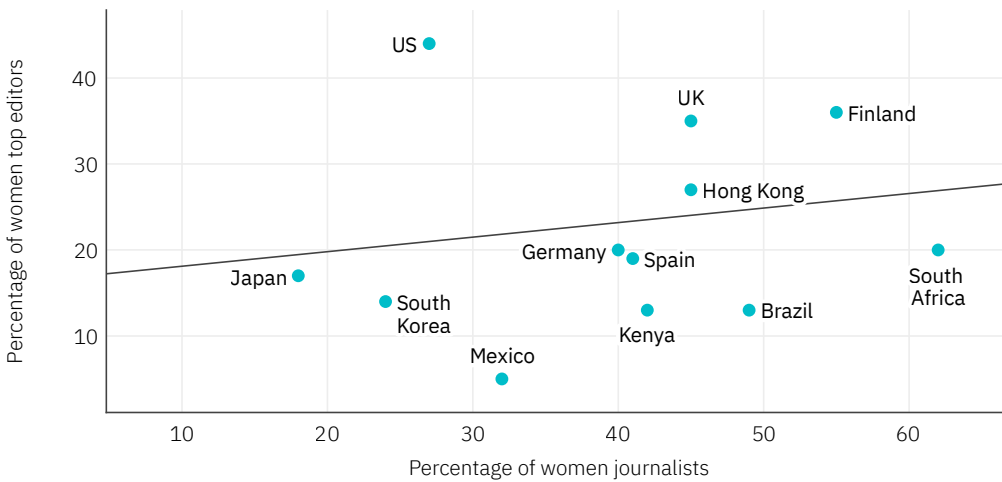
Data not collected for Kenya or Spain in 2020.

Source: Data collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the gender of top editors at 200 news outlets in 2020 and 240 news outlets in 2021–2023.

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).² As in previous years, we find a weak positive

correlation. (As we note every year, 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 women journalists vs. percentage of women top editors



Source: Data collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the gender of top editors at 240 news outlets in 2023. Data on women journalists from *Worlds of Journalism* project (2012–2016).

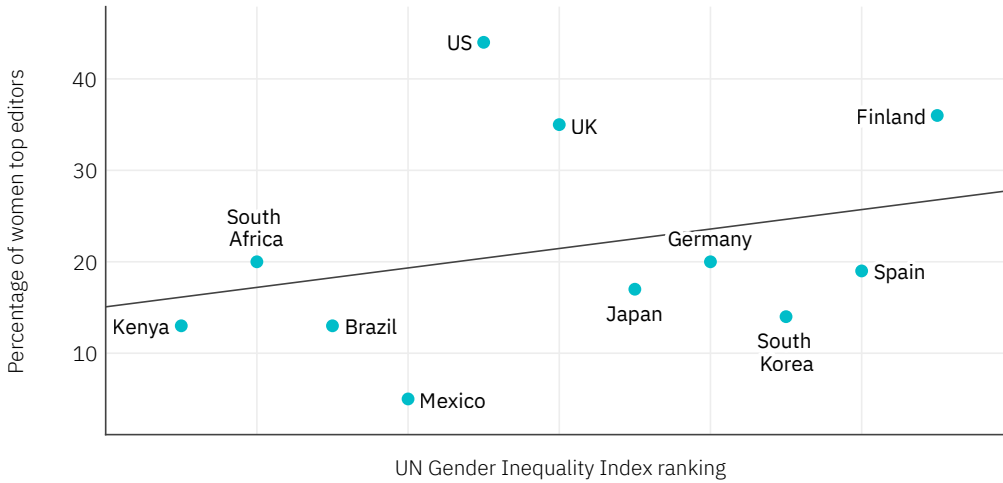
If we look at the percentage of women in top editorial positions in the context of data on gender inequality in society more broadly, relying on data from the UN

Gender Inequality Index (2021), shown in Figure 3, there is only a very weak correlation across 11 markets (Hong Kong is not included in the UN GII).³

² Please note that the *Worlds of Journalism* data is not collected as frequently as the *Digital News Report* data or the UN GII data, but we use it here as the best available cross-country comparative data on the gender breakdown of the journalistic workforce. The data from Hanitzsch et al. (2019) used in this analysis were collected between 2012 and 2016.

³ UN GII rankings were re-coded for interpretability, with the highest-ranked (worst GII score) country coded here as 1 and the lowest-ranked (best GII score) country coded here as 11.

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



Hong Kong is not included in the UN GII.

Source: Data collected by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the gender of top editors at 240 news outlets in 2023. Data on gender inequality from the United Nations 2021 GII, with ranking rescored from worst to best.

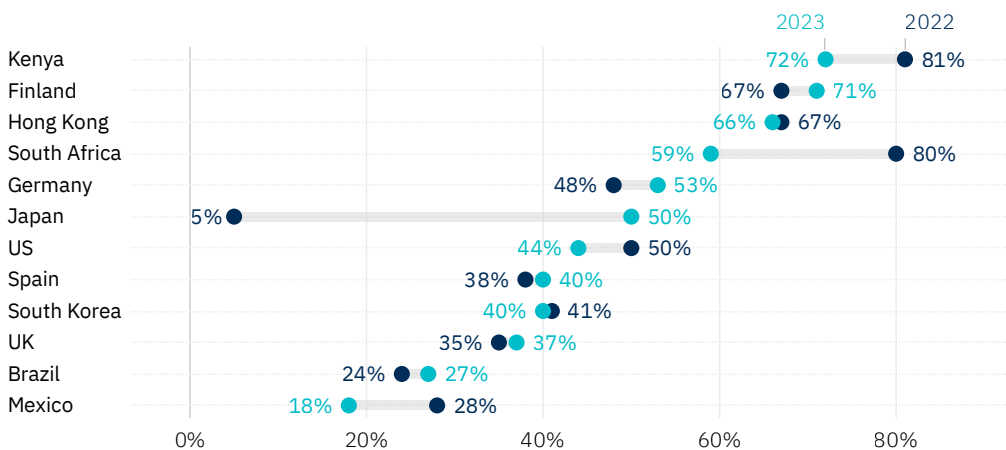
Several countries covered here illustrate that higher gender equality, as measured by the UN GII, does not in itself mean more women in top editorial positions. Further, in past years, we found no positive correlation between gender equality more broadly and the percentage of women among top editors – underlining the importance of dynamics internal to journalism and the news media (rather than broader structural factors) in the gender composition of top editors, something frequently highlighted by country-specific studies.

Finally, by combining the data collected for this Reuters Institute factsheet with data from the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2022* (Newman et al. 2022), 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 consume news from at least one major outlet with a woman as the top editor ranges from, at the high end, 72% in Kenya and 71% in Finland to, at the low end, 18% in Mexico and 27% in Brazil. This year, in half of the markets covered, less than half of online news users have accessed news from at least one major outlet with a woman as top editor in the past week. The average across all markets covered is 48%. This figure too is basically unchanged since we started the work in 2020 (where the figure was 49% across the ten markets covered).

Figure 4. Percentage of online news users using at least one source with a woman 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 2022 and 2023. Data on news audiences from the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2022*.

Conclusion

In this Reuters Institute factsheet, we have analysed 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. We have found that the clear majority of top editors across the sample are men. All the markets covered have a majority, often a large majority, of men in top editorial positions.

While there is a very 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 editorial roles than women in the profession as a whole. Similarly, we find only a very weak correlation 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 and in terms of career progression in the industry.

Despite continued critical scrutiny of the lack of diversity in the industry, and recognition of how poorly journalism and the news media often reflect the societies they cover in terms of their personnel profile – especially at the senior level – we have found no overall trend towards greater gender parity among top editors. Looking at the past three years for which we have collected data on the 12 markets covered here, year-on-year turnover among top editors has averaged 21%, and the average percentage of women among the new appointments has been no higher than that among the top editors overall. There have been significant changes over this period in some countries, and of course in individual organisations, but not always in the direction of greater gender parity, and there has been little change at the aggregate level.

Therefore, while recent years have seen an ongoing 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 2022 to 2023, or in the years since 2020.

Perhaps part of the reason is that some people in the news media believe the industry is already where it needs to be in terms of diversity, at least when it

comes to gender: 79% of industry leaders in one recent survey said they felt their organisation was doing a ‘good job’ when it comes to gender diversity (Cherubini 2022). It may be that gender diversity is improving at lower levels of newsroom leadership, but not at the very top. Another possible factor is that, faced with many challenges, while in principle recognising problems around diversity, news media in practice prioritise scarce resources for other issues they consider more important or more pressing. The same study found that only 50% of the organisations covered even *collected* data on the diversity of their leadership, and just 39% had a dedicated budget to promote diversity in their newsrooms. Without data, without money, and without a real commitment to making difficult decisions, it will be hard to change. At a basic level, the status quo ‘feels like supreme hypocrisy on the part of the journalism industry’, Meredith Clark has said, highlighting how unwilling the industry seems to be to hold itself to account by sharing or publishing basic data.⁴

Some individual voices and professional associations, as well as outside critics and observers, continue to drive the ongoing debate about diversity (and lack thereof) in the news media, and some organisations are taking steps to address these issues. In Spain, Iranzo-Cabrera et al. (2023) interviewed journalists who have in recent years been appointed to editorial positions meant to encourage gender equality in their organisations. They found that, even in these cases, despite some progress, those interviewed found their work was ‘hampered by a lack of management support’. A few organisations collect and sometimes publicise data on their own individual track record. In some cases, others collect data on specific organisations, such as The Washington Post Guild (2022) pay study, which found that women and people of colour at the company are still paid less than their male and white colleagues.

Various entities – including the Global Alliance on Media and Gender, the International Women’s Media Foundation, and the International Center for Journalists – as well as many individuals work hard to keep the industry’s focus on these issues. But overall, at least at the level of top editors, we have found no substantial change in the years we have collected data. What does the future hold? We will know more when we repeat this analysis and publish new data in 2024 to track developments in gender equality among top editors across the world.

⁴ <https://www.niemanlab.org/2022/04/crushing-resistance-yet-again-newsrooms-arent-showing-up-to-the-industrys-largest-diversity-survey/>

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