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Beyond the Prison Cell: Comprehensive Study of Iranian Journalists Working in Iran

Abstract:

Reporters without Borders calls Iran the ‘largest prison for journalists,’ private broadcasting is prohibited, journalists are prosecuted, and many fled after the 2009 elections. Most reports focus thus on intimidation and jailed journalists, and there is no systematic evidence on Iranian journalistic practice. We are the first to comprehensively portray Iranian journalists working in Iran. We conducted a field study among systematic sample of Iranian journalists to assess (1) their operating environment (e.g., perceived freedoms or satisfaction), (2) professional roles vis-à-vis the public, (3) sources used for story production, and (4) the extent to which online censorship affects their work. We find few differences between journalists from state-owned and independent outlets in how they perceive their operating environment, yet state journalists see advocacy as more important. Further, respondents use search engines for content production on par with traditional sources, often encounter blocked websites and report being able to use circumvention tools comfortably. Implications are discussed.