

Albania

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INTRODUCTION

During the WJS3 data collection (2021–2022), Albania's media environment was shaped by political dominance, economic fragility, and declining press freedom. The ruling Socialist Party consolidated power following the 2021 elections, while media outlets faced pressure from both political actors and media owners with economic interests. Journalists operated under precarious conditions: low pay, job insecurity, and limited editorial autonomy.

In 2022, Albania dropped to 103rd in the World Press Freedom Index, its worst ranking to date. This reflected political interference, threats against journalists, and the rise of online harassment, especially targeting women. A proposed anti-defamation package and the creation of the Media and Information Agency further restricted access to official information.

Despite these challenges, Albanian journalists continue to uphold their roles, navigating a complex landscape marked by censorship risks, economic pressures, and a polarized public sphere.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Albanian journalists are generally young and well-educated. Women make up 55.8% of the sample, with an average age of 32.6 years (SD = 8.7). Approximately 97.3% hold a university degree: Bachelor's (37.1%), Master's (57.6%), or Doctorate (2.1%). About 85.2% have formal journalism training, predominantly (91.4%) from universities or colleges. Many others entered the field after training in different disciplines, reflecting a broadly professionalized and academically qualified journalistic workforce.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

Most journalists (94.7%) are employed full-time, while a smaller group (5.3%) work part-time, and only 2.6% are freelancers. Even though 74.2% hold permanent contracts, job insecurity persists: approximately 25% of journalists have an additional job outside journalism to supplement their income. Journalists have an average of 9.7 years of experience (SD = 7.6; Median = 7), reflecting a blend of mid-career professionals and relatively newer entrants. Membership in journalists' unions remains limited, with only 32.5% affiliated, indicating weak collective representation.

Journalists typically face demanding workloads, averaging 45.4 hours per week (SD = 7.8; Median = 45) for those in full-time employment, and 56.8% report frequently experiencing stress at work (often or very often). Around 54.6% of journalists cover specific beats, indicating a near-even split between specialists and generalists. Television continues as the primary background of employer (approximately 40%), followed by print outlets including newspapers and magazines (25%) and radio stations. Digital-native outlets are steadily growing, employing around 15% of journalists, signaling a gradual digital shift. Employment in news agencies remains minimal (under 5%). While most journalists operate within urban settings, a significant portion (29.3%) work for local or regional media outlets.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Among Albanian journalists, harassment and intimidation, including threats or demeaning speech, were among the most frequently experienced threats (see Table 1). Although incidents of direct physical attacks and legal threats were reported less frequently, these remain concerning, significantly influencing journalists' overall sense of safety. A notable portion (about one-fourth) of journalists expressed worry about potential job loss within the next year, while a clear majority were concerned about their emotional and mental well-being, as well as their physical safety (see Table 2). Furthermore, approximately two-thirds of respondents expressed significant concern about impunity for those who perpetrate violence against journalists.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	283	3.5%	9.8%	27.3%	21.3%	38.1%
Public discrediting of your work	283	0.7%	5.2%	13.3%	15.7%	65.0%
Surveillance	282	2.5%	16.3%	19.5%	18.1%	43.6%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	269	1.0%	4.5%	4.5%	11.8%	78.0%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	280	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	1.8%	97.2%
Legal actions against you because of your work	280	0.7%	0.4%	1.4%	6.4%	91.2%
Stalking	280	0.0%	1.1%	1.8%	6.3%	90.8%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	282	0.0%	1.8%	6.3%	13.0%	78.9%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	282	0.0%	0.4%	3.6%	4.3%	91.8%
Other physical attacks	274	0.0%	0.4%	3.2%	8.2%	88.3%
Coercion	279	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	4.6%	95.0%
Questioning of your personal morality	278	3.1%	0.8%	5.0%	9.9%	81.3%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	281	1.9%	1.5%	3.3%	11.9%	81.4%
Others disseminating your personal information	281	1.5%	1.9%	10.2%	13.2%	73.3%
Workplace bullying	281	1.5%	0.0%	8.5%	14.2%	75.8%
Abductions	266	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	0.4%	98.1%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	268	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	2.3%	96.9%
Intimidation that targets family	280	0.0%	0.4%	0.8%	1.5%	97.3%

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

TABLE 2. WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Worried about losing job in journalism within the next 12 months	283	23.8%	2.37	1.35
Concerned about physical well-being	284	38.2%	2.97	1.33
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	282	63.8%	3.63	1.21
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Albania go unpunished	282	67.5%	3.79	1.17

Question: "Thinking about your work, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

JOURNALISTIC ROLES

Albanian journalists expressed strong support for objectivist roles, while audience-oriented and educative approaches remain significantly valued but somewhat less prominent (see Table 3). Politically assertive or advocacy-related roles were among the least valued. Nonetheless, substantial minorities – around one-third – of the interviewed journalists viewed roles such as advocating for social change (37.0%) or monitoring those in power (34.6%) as extremely or very important. Explicitly political functions like setting the political agenda (8.7%) or motivating political participation (12.9%) were least appreciated but still received notable support from a minority of respondents.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/ Extremely im- portant	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	283	61.8%	4.30	1.03
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	283	34.6%	3.63	1.26
Shine a light on society's problems	282	63.5%	4.50	0.79
Motivate people to participate in politics	269	12.9%	2.19	1.41
Provide analysis of current affairs	280	32.3%	3.71	1.17
Let people express their views	280	56.4%	4.31	0.94
Provide information people need to form political opinion	280	37.9%	3.68	1.35
Advocate for social change	282	37.0%	4.00	0.96
Influence public opinion	282	25.7%	3.46	1.25
Set the political agenda	274	8.7%	2.16	1.35
Promote peace and tolerance	279	52.3%	4.16	1.08
Educate the audience	278	53.0%	4.19	1.04
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	281	49.8%	4.19	1.00
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	281	36.3%	3.77	1.24
Support national development	281	48.1%	4.12	1.02
Support government policy	266	5.2%	1.76	1.15
Convey a positive image of political leaders	268	6.3%	1.70	1.19
Provide entertainment and relaxation	280	17.2%	2.66	1.45
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	281	30.5%	3.32	1.46
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	281	28.3%	3.53	1.27

Question: "Please tell me how important it is to do each of the following in your daily work." (Scale: 5 = Extremely important; 4 = Very important; 3 = Moderately important; 2 = Slightly important; 1 = Not at all important.)

JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

There was considerable agreement among Albanian journalists regarding their perceptions of journalistic epistemologies (see Table 4). Respondents strongly concurred on the possibility of objectively representing reality, the importance of letting facts speak for themselves, and the necessity of alerting audiences about untruthful claims. Conversely, the idea that interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts, and that journalists' personal beliefs inevitably influence reporting, received notably less support.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	281	15.7%	3.21	1.35
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	277	6.4%	2.52	1.25
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	282	7.7%	2.32	1.28
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	282	21.8%	3.23	1.35
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	279	48.4%	4.37	0.85
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	272	4.7%	2.19	1.19
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	271	6.6%	2.58	1.24
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	272	48.6%	4.25	0.92
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	270	11.8%	2.70	1.41
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	273	44.6%	4.11	1.07
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	270	48.0%	4.36	0.74

Questions: "The following statements deal with beliefs related to how journalists know what they know. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree." / "Using the same scale, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following beliefs." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

Journalists in Albania strongly agreed on the centrality of professional ethical standards over subjective or situational considerations in journalistic decision-making (see Table 5). When evaluating controversial reporting methods (see Table 6), accepting money from sources or fabricating stories were overwhelmingly rejected. However, many journalists found it acceptable to use hidden recordings and, in certain cases, justified adopting false identities to obtain information.

TABLE 5. ETHICAL ORIENTATIONS

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
What is ethical for journalists should always be determined by professional standards regardless of situation and personal judgment	282	92.2%	4.64	0.78
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	279	47.7%	3.39	1.18
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	277	15.5%	2.33	1.15
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	273	8.8%	1.75	1.12

Question: "The following statements describe different responses journalists may have to ethical problems. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

TABLE 6. JUSTIFICATION OF CONTROVERSIAL REPORTING METHODS

	N	Always justified	Justified on occasion
Claiming to be somebody else	276	1.1%	26.8%
Using hidden recording devices	283	7.4%	65.4%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	280	7.5%	55.0%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	282	14.9%	50.0%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	282	1.1%	30.1%
Paying people for confidential information	283	7.4%	43.5%
Accepting money from sources	283	0.4%	4.2%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	282	1.1%	11.0%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	280	1.8%	31.1%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	281	0.7%	13.2%

Question: "Which of the following, if any, do you think may be always justified, or justified on occasion, and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?"

EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

Albanian journalists indicated moderate levels of editorial autonomy, with around half reporting significant freedom in choosing news stories (50.3%) and determining their emphasis (46.5%) (see Table 7). Nevertheless, perceptions of media freedom in Albania as a whole were much lower (20.8%), highlighting a critical awareness of systemic constraints. This contrast suggests that individual autonomy in newsroom decisions exists, but is heavily influenced by broader structural pressures, including political interference, economic control, and ongoing challenges such as self-censorship and restricted access to official information.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	280	50.3%	3.81	0.84
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	263	46.5%	3.71	0.91
Media freedom in Albania	283	20.8%	2.84	0.89

(Scale: 5 = Complete freedom; 4 = A great deal of freedom; 3 = Some freedom; 2 = Little freedom; 1 = No freedom at all.)

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Albanian journalists identified journalism ethics (46.1%), time limits (28.7%), availability of news-gathering resources (26.7%), and editorial policy (27.6%) as the strongest internal influences on news production (see Table 8). Additionally, personal values and beliefs (34.2%) significantly shaped journalistic decisions. Among external factors, media laws and regulations (29.4%), access to information (28.5%), and organizational ownership (25.2%) were reported as notably influential. Direct political pressures from government officials (10.2%) or politicians (7.7%) ranked lower, yet indirect influences through ownership structures, advertising considerations, and economic pressures remain substantial challenges to editorial independence in Albanian media.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	282	8.1%	2.82	1.17
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	277	19.6%	3.62	0.97
The business managers of the news organization	274	18.0%	3.29	1.29
The owners of the news organization	265	25.2%	3.45	1.32
Editorial policy	280	27.6%	3.65	1.20
Advertising considerations	274	15.4%	3.17	1.29
Profit expectations	264	9.7%	2.45	1.36
Audience research and data	273	16.7%	3.16	1.28
Availability of news-gathering resources	278	26.7%	3.69	1.12
Time limits	279	28.7%	3.82	1.02
Journalism ethics	281	46.1%	4.25	0.86
Self-censorship	260	7.2%	2.72	1.20
Personal values and beliefs	272	34.2%	3.42	1.52
Colleagues in other media	265	4.9%	2.21	1.21
Friends, acquaintances and family	226	6.3%	2.02	1.24
Feedback from the audience	280	16.1%	3.19	1.20
Competing news organizations	272	11.7%	2.65	1.30
Media laws and regulation	284	29.4%	3.52	1.27
Access to information	281	28.5%	3.78	1.07
Government censorship	267	10.6%	2.64	1.36
Government officials	262	10.2%	2.42	1.40
Politicians	258	7.7%	2.35	1.36
Business	256	6.7%	2.18	1.29
Public relations	269	9.1%	2.45	1.27
Relationships with news sources	278	17.0%	3.19	1.31
Police	234	7.7%	2.16	1.36
Issue advocacy groups	223	4.4%	1.82	1.21
Scientists or health experts	229	9.7%	2.44	1.41
Religious groups and institutions	180	0.8%	1.51	0.92
Military	166	0.8%	1.30	0.74
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	164	0.4%	1.26	0.65
Organized crime and criminal groups	180	6.9%	1.62	1.26
Terrorist groups	168	1.7%	1.29	0.80

Question: "Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work as a journalist." (Scale: 5 = Extremely influential; 4 = Very influential; 3 = Moderately influential; 2 = Slightly influential; 1 = Not at all influential.)