

Finland

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INTRODUCTION

Finland enjoys a stable political environment with a multiparty system. The current government is right-leaning. Economic challenges stem from global market volatility, yet growth is supported by a robust technology and education sector. Socially, Finland is renowned for its egalitarianism and comprehensive welfare system, but an aging population presents challenges.

The media system in Finland leans historically on strong democratic corporatist and media welfare state traditions. Journalistic tradition is rooted in freedom of the press and freedom of expression, journalistic integrity, and high ethical standards. Finland consistently ranks among the top performers in international press freedom indices.

However, hostility towards the work of journalists has been increasing and digital transition has resulted in substantial transformations and layoffs in the media industry since the 2010s. While Finland's press fares better compared to many other European countries, concerns are mounting about the quality and future of journalism, particularly in local and regional media outlets.

The fieldwork for this study in Finland took place in 2021–22 when the country was suffering under the COVID pandemic and began to see the economic effects of the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022. For Finnish journalism, these developments marked another episode in a long line of challenges that have increased pressures on journalists to rethink their professional values and working ways.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The gender and age distribution of Finnish respondents indicates a relatively experienced and predominantly female journalist population. 60.1% identified as female, and the average age was 47.4 years (SD = 11.7, Median = 47.5). Both figures closely align with the membership data by the Finnish Union of Journalists. Respondents were highly educated: 77.3% had a university degree, most often a master's (48.9%). A slight majority (54.0%) had completed a journalism-related degree or professional training. In this group, a university or college degree was by far the most prevalent (80.5%).

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In terms of the background of their main employers, almost two thirds worked primarily in print media organizations (newspapers: 37.5%, magazines: 27.9%). 8.3% worked for radio outlets and 7.6% for TV organizations. 58.9% represented commercial outlets, but the single biggest employer was the public service media YLE with a 20.0% share of respondents. A slight majority (52.1%) worked for national media while regional and local media accounted for 19.1% and 18.8%, respectively.

The average professional experience in journalism among the respondents was 20.4 years (SD = 11.5, Median = 20), up from the 17.3 years observed in the previous WJS survey in 2013. 56.4% identified themselves as rank-and-file journalists, while 13.1% placed themselves in middle management and 30.5% in top management. Challenges in data collection led to particularly editors-in-chief of small newspapers being overrepresented in the sample. A clear majority (86.5%) were members in a professional association.

Most informants, 62.8%, had full-time permanent contracts. However, as a sign of increasing precarity, the proportion of such respondents had declined by approximately six percentage points from the previous WJS survey. Freelancers comprised 22.2% of the sample. Almost one in three (30.6%) had income from other jobs than journalism. The most common occupations mentioned were education, public relations/corporate communications, and advertising.

On average, respondents worked approximately 38.2 hours per week (SD = 6.6, Median = 37.5; for those in full-time employment). 39.9% specialized in one or more subject areas, while the rest classified themselves as generalists. Generalist journalism appears to have gained prominence since the previous WJS survey. The three most common areas of specialization among respondents were culture, economics, and news and current affairs.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Finnish journalists can operate in a relatively safe environment: almost half of the safety threats inquired had been experienced by no more than 10% of respondents (see Table 1). Different forms of verbal harassment were the most common threats while physical attacks, arrests and intimidation targeting journalists' families were the least frequent ones. Of work-related concerns (see Table 2), impunity for those who obstruct journalists' work was the strongest, with an alarming three in five respondents (strongly) concerned about this. Moreover, around 40% were worried about the mental strain of journalistic work. However, only one in nine respondents expressed their apprehension about losing their journalistic job.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	409	2.9%	7.6%	34.2%	39.6%	15.6%
Public discrediting of your work	409	3.9%	10.0%	33.7%	31.8%	20.5%
Surveillance	409	1.5%	4.6%	17.1%	27.6%	49.1%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	409	0.5%	0.5%	2.0%	6.8%	90.2%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	409	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.2%	99.3%
Legal actions against you because of your work	409	0.2%	0.2%	0.7%	4.9%	93.9%
Stalking	409	0.2%	1.2%	1.7%	8.6%	88.3%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	409	0.5%	1.7%	9.3%	24.0%	64.5%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	409	0.2%	0.5%	2.2%	7.1%	90.0%
Other physical attacks	409	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	3.2%	95.6%
Coercion	409	1.2%	2.0%	14.2%	35.9%	46.7%
Questioning of your personal morality	409	2.0%	4.2%	22.5%	31.1%	40.3%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	409	0.5%	0.2%	2.9%	11.0%	85.3%
Others disseminating your personal information	409	0.0%	0.5%	2.2%	5.6%	91.7%
Workplace bullying	409	1.2%	1.0%	5.1%	12.5%	80.2%
Intimidation that targets family	409	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	3.2%	95.8%

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	409	11.0%	1.98	1.07
Concerned about physical well-being	409	23.5%	2.37	1.17
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	409	40.6%	2.91	1.22
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Finland go unpunished	409	60.4%	3.49	1.08

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

Finnish journalists' role perceptions highlight primarily their critical and analytical approach, and their aspirations for relaying objective and neutral information (see Table 3). Counteracting disinformation was regarded as the most crucial professional role. At the other end of the scale, maintaining critical distance to political actors and political agenda-setting were imperative.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	409	76.8%	4.06	0.87
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	409	59.4%	3.66	1.14
Shine a light on society's problems	409	72.6%	4.07	0.96
Motivate people to participate in politics	409	22.0%	2.67	1.12
Provide analysis of current affairs	409	74.3%	4.04	0.94
Let people express their views	409	61.9%	3.75	1.00
Provide information people need to form political opinion	409	48.4%	3.31	1.30
Advocate for social change	409	24.2%	2.80	1.08
Influence public opinion	409	22.2%	2.78	1.05
Set the political agenda	409	3.4%	1.76	0.85
Promote peace and tolerance	409	54.0%	3.56	1.16
Educate the audience	409	65.0%	3.77	1.00
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	409	51.3%	3.48	1.01
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	409	37.7%	3.22	1.10
Support national development	409	29.8%	2.99	1.08
Support government policy	409	2.0%	1.47	0.73
Convey a positive image of political leaders	409	1.5%	1.40	0.66
Provide entertainment and relaxation	409	27.9%	2.81	1.11
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	409	34.5%	2.98	1.11
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	409	31.8%	3.02	1.09
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	409	38.6%	3.15	1.11
Support efforts to protect public health	409	26.9%	2.84	1.15
Counteract disinformation	409	79.2%	4.21	1.00
Discuss future implications of current events	409	57.5%	3.64	1.02

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

Finnish journalists' responses indicate their strong commitment to fact-based reporting and their resolute stance against mis-/disinformation on one hand, and their notable skepticism and different interpretations of objectivity on the other hand (see Table 4). This ambivalence suggests an ongoing reworking of objectivity. The idea of transparency as its replacement was still met with doubt.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	409	73.3%	3.80	0.87
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	409	61.1%	3.58	0.85
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	409	22.0%	2.67	0.95
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	409	9.5%	2.13	0.92
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	409	42.1%	3.15	0.96
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	409	10.3%	2.22	0.91
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	409	28.6%	2.75	0.99
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	409	80.4%	3.92	0.73
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	409	6.1%	1.98	0.82
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	409	23.2%	2.76	1.00
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	409	90.7%	4.25	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

Finnish journalists exhibit a robust confidence in professional standards (see Table 5). They harbor a generally negative perception of controversial practices (see Table 6), which can mostly be attributed to their support for the national ethical code, and to the way its specific clauses are written (see <https://jsn.fi/en/journalists-guidelines/>). The most widely accepted measures focus on monitoring the actions of authorities and those in positions of power, which aligns with journalists' watchdog orientation.

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	409	75.3%	3.97	0.86
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	409	35.9%	2.99	1.08
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	409	13.0%	2.22	1.00
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	409	6.8%	1.79	0.92

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	409	0.2%	59.4%
Using hidden recording devices	409	0.5%	77.0%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	409	3.4%	70.9%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	409	0.7%	61.4%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	409	0.5%	14.4%
Paying people for confidential information	409	0.2%	21.8%
Accepting money from sources	409	0.5%	1.5%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	409	0.7%	31.3%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	409	0.2%	5.1%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	409	0.0%	49.9%

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

Finnish journalists have a high level of autonomy to select their news topics and to decide their story angles. Journalists' responses regarding media freedom closely align with their individual experiences of autonomy: the vast majority believe that the news media in Finland has at least a great deal of freedom. Few respondents reported about lack of personal autonomy or media freedom.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	409	74.8%	3.91	0.82
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	409	83.1%	4.05	0.70
Media freedom in Finland	404	83.9%	3.88	0.55

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Among factors influencing Finnish journalists, internal elements are strongly emphasized, in line with the previous WJS survey. Eight out of ten of the most influential factors are internal, with journalism ethics at the top of the list. At the bottom of the list, there are several external factors that are virtually unknown in Finland (e.g., paramilitary groups or terrorist groups).

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	358	39.9%	3.20	1.07
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	373	58.4%	3.58	1.09
The business managers of the news organization	350	15.1%	2.33	1.17
The owners of the news organization	342	12.3%	2.11	1.15
Editorial policy	393	63.1%	3.76	1.01
Advertising considerations	341	5.6%	1.77	0.94
Profit expectations	339	20.1%	2.44	1.25
Audience research and data	378	39.2%	3.26	1.12
Availability of news-gathering resources	373	65.7%	3.89	1.07
Time limits	400	61.3%	3.78	1.00
Journalism ethics	393	73.3%	4.05	1.07
Self-censorship	380	4.7%	1.99	0.84
Personal values and beliefs	399	30.8%	3.13	1.02
Colleagues in other media	400	6.8%	2.29	0.86
Friends, acquaintances and family	397	5.5%	2.10	0.84
Feedback from the audience	405	11.9%	2.65	0.84
Competing news organizations	396	14.6%	2.63	0.89
Media laws and regulation	395	60.3%	3.70	1.05
Access to information	396	62.9%	3.70	0.99
Government censorship	362	7.2%	1.80	1.01
Government officials	379	7.4%	1.90	1.00
Politicians	376	6.4%	1.85	0.98
Business people	379	4.0%	1.79	0.89
Public relations	379	4.5%	1.92	0.89
Relationships with news sources	389	23.1%	2.75	1.10
Police	372	7.8%	1.80	0.99
Issue advocacy groups	385	3.6%	1.74	0.84
Scientists or health experts	395	23.3%	2.67	1.20
Religious groups and institutions	377	1.3%	1.45	0.69
Military	364	2.7%	1.47	0.78
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	348	1.1%	1.17	0.56
Organized crime and criminal groups	358	0.6%	1.15	0.47
Terrorist groups	353	0.6%	1.10	0.44

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.)