

Hungary¹

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy was institutionalized in Hungary in 1989, as a result of which a multi-tier system came into being. The first democratically elected government in 1990 began abolishing the centrally planned economy in order to develop a new market-based economy. The most prominent state organ is the 199-member parliament, the Hungarian National Assembly. Its legal status and functions are regulated by the Constitution, and its members are elected every four years in the course of a regular election campaign.

As of 2025, Hungary is characterized by democratic backsliding, crucial political and economic crisis, national conservative majority (2/3) in the parliament. Victor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary calls his political system illiberal Christian Democracy, where democracy has been gradually disappearing since his first term in 1998. His party (FIDESZ) in coalition with the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) was elected for the fifth times in 2022 (1998-2002, 2010-2014, 2014-2018, 2018-2022, 2022-).

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The sample of Hungarian journalists shows male dominance compared to female journalists: 65.8% male, 34.2% female. On average, they were 39.4 years old. They are generally well educated: 50% has Bachelor's degree or equivalent, 35.8% has Master's degree or equivalent, 7.4% has some university studies, 5.8% completed high school and 1.1% has Doctorate degree.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

The vast majority of Hungarian journalists (75.3%) worked for private, commercial media, 11.1% for public service media, 4.2% for state-run media, and 3.7% for community media. 5.8% claimed not to have a major medium. Regarding area of coverage, 77.4% of journalists reported they mainly work for national, transnational media, while 17.4% primarily hold jobs at local or regional media.

As for the main employer, 51.1% of the interviewed journalists worked for native online media, 15.8% for magazines, 11.1% for newspapers, 7.9% for news agencies, 7.9% for telecommunications, 2.1% for television channels, 1.6% for radio channels, and 2.6% had no main employer.

More than half (58.9%) of the interviewed journalists had a full-time, permanent contract. Almost a third of them (25.3%) worked as freelancers or self-employed, 14.7% had a part-time, permanent contract. In addition, 52.6% of the respondents confessed that they have income only from journalism, but 47.4% had income from other sources as well.

The average working week for Hungarian journalists has 40.1 hours (SD = 8.8; Median = 40). Relatedly, 11.6% reported they felt stressed out at work very often, 30.5% often, only 16.3% (2.6% and 13.7%) had never or rarely experienced that feeling.

¹ Country sample does not fully align with WJS specifications regarding maximum margin of error (see WJS3 Methodology).

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Verbal harassment such as demeaning or hateful speech, public discrediting of journalists' work, surveillance, questioning of personal morality were among the most common safety threats experienced by Hungarian journalists (see Table 1). Hacking or blocking, legal action, stalking, others using byline, disseminating personal information were also among the threats that worried the journalists. Hungarian journalists are concerned about losing their jobs. That was the reason why the majority of the journalists refused to fill out the questionnaire or they were willing to answer just some of the questions. They experience a huge political, economic, emotional, and sometimes physical pressure on themselves. They don't feel safe except for those who serve the „legal political power and propaganda“. They are aware of the fact that those who harm the journalists go unpunished (see Table 2.)

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	190	5.3%	13.7%	28.9%	18.4%	33.7%
Public discrediting of your work	190	4.2%	11.6%	23.7%	21.1%	39.5%
Surveillance	190	1.1%	8.4%	12.6%	22.6%	55.3%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	190	1.1%	3.2%	8.4%	26.3%	61.1%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	190	0.0%	0.0%	1.6%	2.1%	96.3%
Legal actions against you because of your work	190	1.1%	0.5%	6.3%	16.8%	75.3%
Stalking	190	0.5%	1.1%	4.7%	8.4%	85.3%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	190	1.1%	1.6%	11.1%	23.7%	62.6%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	190	0.0%	0.0%	2.6%	2.1%	95.3%
Other physical attacks	190	0.0%	0.0%	1.6%	2.1%	96.3%
Coercion	190	0.0%	1.1%	1.1%	12.6%	85.3%
Questioning of your personal morality	190	4.2%	6.3%	16.8%	22.6%	50.0%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	190	0.5%	7.9%	3.2%	15.3%	73.2%
Others disseminating your personal information	190	0.0%	3.2%	3.7%	15.8%	77.4%
Workplace bullying	190	0.5%	0.0%	1.1%	4.7%	93.7%
Abductions	190	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	99.5%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	190	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	3.2%	96.3%
Intimidation that targets family	190	0.0%	0.5%	2.6%	6.8%	90.0%

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	190	22.1%	2.61	1.19
Concerned about physical well-being	190	22.1%	2.54	1.17
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	190	41.1%	3.09	1.23
Concerned that those who harm journalists in [country] go unpunished	190	47.9%	3.31	1.25

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

Most of the Hungarian journalists who were willing to participate in the survey expressed firm belief that a journalist should be a detached observer who highlights society's problems providing information, pointing toward possible solutions and educating. They are motivated to provide analysis of the political, social agenda, and support national development. Most of them declared that they counteract disinformation.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	190	88.4%	4.22	0.88
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	190	48.4%	3.31	1.28
Shine a light on society's problems	190	67.9%	3.89	1.02
Motivate people to participate in politics	190	10.5%	2.29	1.09
Provide analysis of current affairs	190	33.2%	2.90	1.27
Let people express their views	190	48.4%	3.28	1.26
Provide information people need to form political opinion	190	43.2%	3.11	1.36
Advocate for social change	190	45.3%	3.26	1.23
Influence public opinion	190	25.8%	2.74	1.21
Set the political agenda	190	11.1%	2.18	1.05
Promote peace and tolerance	190	56.3%	3.53	1.20
Educate the audience	190	70.0%	3.93	1.01
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	190	64.7%	3.68	1.12
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	190	34.7%	3.02	1.26
Support national development	190	41.6%	3.06	1.24
Support government policy	190	5.3%	1.61	0.97
Convey a positive image of political leaders	190	4.7%	1.52	0.94
Provide entertainment and relaxation	190	55.8%	3.63	1.20
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	190	34.2%	3.06	1.12
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	190	41.6%	3.26	1.17
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	190	40.5%	3.15	1.23
Support efforts to protect public health	190	38.4%	3.03	1.23
Counteract disinformation	190	72.1%	4.01	1.15
Discuss future implications of current events	190	50.0%	3.24	1.19

Questions: "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

Most of the interviewed Hungarian journalists agree that the journalist should interpret what’s going on in the society, they should show the facts and represent the objective reality. Half of them believe that “truth” is shaped by the politicians in power, that’s why they have to alert the audience when a claim, a statement, or propaganda representation is untruthful.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	190	79.5%	4.16	0.95
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	190	57.4%	3.40	1.12
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	190	23.2%	2.85	0.98
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	190	33.7%	3.01	1.14
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	190	59.5%	3.70	0.99
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what’s true and what’s not	190	44.7%	3.32	0.96
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	190	26.8%	2.84	1.15
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	190	67.4%	3.76	0.84
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	190	15.3%	2.38	1.05
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	190	13.2%	2.31	1.03
Journalists should alert audiences when a source’s claim is untruthful	190	74.2%	4.14	0.84

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 Hungary strongly agreed on the necessity of professional standards rather than on personal judgement except for extraordinary circumstances. A quarter of the interviewed journalists think they have to consider the specific situation and then make the decision. Half of the journalists can justify and claim to be somebody else, use hidden recording devices and confidential documents without authorization, and also accepting money from sources.

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	190	71.1%	3.88	0.90
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	190	45.3%	3.28	1.09
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	190	25.8%	2.58	1.23
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	190	10.5%	2.08	1.05

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	190	5.3%	47.4%
Using hidden recording devices	190	7.9%	57.4%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	190	11.6%	41.8%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	190	5.8%	42.1%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	190	1.6%	15.3%
Paying people for confidential information	190	6.3%	42.1%
Accepting money from sources	190	2.1%	18.4%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	190	4.2%	28.9%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	190	4.2%	23.2%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	190	1.6%	2.1%

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

Hungarian journalists reported great deal of freedom in selecting the stories and deciding which aspect of the story to emphasize. Media freedom was rated very low. It is due to the fact that the vast majority of Hungarian media is under strict governmental control and censorship.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	190	77.9%	4.01	0.82
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	190	79.5%	4.12	0.81
Media freedom in [country]	190	12.1%	2.56	0.87

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Hungarian journalists found journalism ethics very high among the internal factors influencing news production. Among the external factors, a great number of the journalists agreed that personal values and beliefs, media laws and regulations, access to information, time limits are extremely influential.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	190	9.5%	2.27	1.02
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	190	36.3%	2.90	1.19
The business managers of the news organization	190	20.0%	2.36	1.22
The owners of the news organization	190	25.8%	2.48	1.35
Editorial policy	190	31.6%	2.88	1.22
Advertising considerations	190	23.2%	2.39	1.22
Profit expectations	190	25.8%	2.48	1.23
Audience research and data	190	31.6%	2.94	1.18
Availability of news-gathering resources	190	28.4%	2.62	1.28
Time limits	190	47.9%	3.37	1.17
Journalism ethics	190	68.4%	3.88	1.08
Self-censorship	190	17.4%	2.39	1.25
Personal values and beliefs	190	63.2%	3.79	1.23
Colleagues in other media	190	18.4%	2.40	1.19
Friends, acquaintances and family	190	13.2%	2.32	1.07
Feedback from the audience	190	19.5%	2.70	.99
Competing news organizations	190	19.5%	2.48	1.10
Media laws and regulation	190	55.8%	3.52	1.13
Access to information	190	56.8%	3.65	1.09
Government censorship	190	17.4%	2.09	1.29
Government officials	190	12.6%	1.97	1.15
Politicians	190	10.0%	1.93	1.15
Business people	190	6.8%	1.78	1.03
Public relations	190	7.4%	1.94	1.05
Relationships with news sources	190	14.2%	2.54	1.13
Police	190	4.2%	1.43	.83
Issue advocacy groups	190	11.6%	1.90	1.06
Scientists or health experts	190	13.7%	2.02	.77
Religious groups and institutions	190	2.1%	1.42	.59
Military	190	1.6%	1.25	.48
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	190	0.5%	1.20	.44
Organized crime and criminal groups	190	0.5%	1.14	.38
Terrorist groups	190	0.0%	1.14	1.18

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).