

Ireland

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INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Ireland in 2025 remains a stable parliamentary democracy, with centre-right coalition governments continuing to shape its political landscape following national elections in 2020 and 2024. Issues such as housing supply, migration and post-Brexit relationships with the UK and EU are staples of political and social discourse as economic growth continues, underpinned by foreign investment particularly from technology companies.

Journalism in Ireland has been shaped by traditional, western “fourth estate” models of professionalism, with strong embedded values around holding power to account and objectivity. Codes of practice from publishers and broadcasters are generally widely respected, while delays in defamation law reform has been a long-standing frustration for the media sector. Public service broadcasting has a strong tradition with radio remaining particularly popular, while highly partisan media is not a trademark of the Irish landscape.

Over the past two decades, local and national newspapers have seen strong declines in circulation and advertising revenue – particularly challenging for the industry because of the relatively small population (5.3 million in 2025) – but most have made a relatively stable transition online. Social media regulation around dis/misinformation is a particularly pertinent issue in Ireland because it is home to many of the platforms’ European headquarters. Data collection in Ireland took place in summer 2021 while the Covid-19 pandemic was still impacting day-to-day life and journalistic work.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The sample was relatively gender balanced with 55.7% of respondents being men, reflecting an ongoing male dominance within the sector. The mean age was 43.5 years (SD = 12.4; Median = 43.5). The level of formal education among Irish journalists is high: 93.5% had some form of third-level education (39.6% had a Bachelor’s degree, 46.2% had a Master’s degree, 2% had a PhD, while 5.7% had some university studies but not a degree). Specifically, in terms of journalism education, two-thirds (67.5%) had some formal training in the profession, with 83% of those respondents receiving it via college or university; 36% had completed apprenticeships or cadetships, while 46% had completed short courses.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

The majority of journalists surveyed (81.8%) worked for national or transnational news organisations, with the remainder in local outlets. In terms of the main media format of their employers, the sample primarily drew on journalists working in organisations with a newspaper background (55.6%), followed by internet natives (13.1%), radio (12.3%) and TV (10%). News agencies (2.6%) and magazines (2.6%) were also represented to a lesser degree, while 4% of respondents said “other” or “no main employer”.

The average years of journalistic work experience in Ireland was 18.7 years (SD = 11.9; Median = 19). One-third (34.7%) worked on a specific beat (such as politics, business, health), while the remaining respondents had a more general scope in their daily work. Most of the samples – 60.4% – had no management role, while 29% were in middle management and 10.7% in top management. The average working week for full-time journalists was 44.8 hours (SD = 7.6; Median = 42).

Regarding working and labour conditions, almost two-thirds (61.4%) of journalists are members of a trade union or professional association. Full-time permanent contracts were the most prevalent employment type (74.4%) in Ireland, suggesting a certain level of stability, with part-time permanent (3.6%), full-time fixed-term (7.2%) and part-time, fixed-term (1.4%) less common. Freelance/self-employed journalists accounted for 13.3% of the respondents. Among the overall sample, 28.4% had some additional stream of income beyond journalism.

Elsewhere, there are clearly pressures and strain embedded into contemporary journalism work in Ireland: when asked if they had felt stressed at work over the past six months, 57.5% said they had felt stressed often or very often; 29.8% said sometimes, and 12.7% said rarely or never.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Ireland is generally a physically safe environment for journalists, with the overwhelming majority never experiencing arrests, detentions or imprisonments (99.2%), sexual assault/harassment (90.6%), stalking (89.1%) or other physical attacks (92.8%). Instead, more verbal criticism is apparent (see Table 1): 20.9% have often/very often experienced demeaning or hateful speech, 19% faced frequent public discrediting of their work, and 15.2% often have their personal morality questioned. In the context of Irish defamation laws, it is worth highlighting that 16.7% had sometimes, often, or very often experienced legal actions. Table 2 highlights wellbeing, where 46.8% said they strongly agreed that they were concerned about their emotional and mental wellbeing; the figure dropped to 25.6% for physical well-being.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	363	6.3%	14.6%	33.3%	28.7%	17.1%
Public discrediting of your work	363	7.7%	11.3%	28.9%	30.6%	21.5%
Surveillance	358	0.8%	1.1%	8.4%	14.5%	75.1%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	362	0.0%	1.7%	8.8%	11.0%	78.5%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	363	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	99.2%
Legal actions against you because of your work	361	1.4%	4.2%	11.1%	17.5%	65.9%
Stalking	358	0.0%	0.3%	5.0%	5.6%	89.1%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	363	0.8%	4.1%	16.5%	21.2%	57.3%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	363	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%	7.4%	90.6%
Other physical attacks	362	0.0%	0.6%	1.4%	5.2%	92.8%
Questioning of your personal morality	360	3.3%	11.9%	22.5%	26.1%	36.1%
Others disseminating your personal information	363	0.0%	3.6%	13.8%	15.2%	67.5%
Workplace bullying	363	1.7%	3.3%	11.3%	12.4%	71.3%

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	363	24.8%	2.48	1.22
Concerned about physical well-being	363	25.6%	2.41	1.22
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	363	46.8%	3.09	1.22
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Ireland go unpunished	362	50.6%	3.35	1.05

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

Three specific roles are seen as very/extremely important for more than 80% of Irish journalists: educating the audience, counteracting disinformation, and shining a light on society's problems (see Table 3). Conversely, there is much less support for conveying a positive image of political leaders or supporting government policy. Notably, as the survey took place in 2021 with the Covid-19 pandemic still an issue, 44% of people said it was very/extremely important to support efforts to protect public health.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	362	71.3%	3.91	1.03
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	362	77.6%	4.09	1.05
Shine a light on society's problems	360	80.6%	4.20	1.02
Motivate people to participate in politics	361	12.5%	2.22	1.15
Provide analysis of current affairs	362	61.0%	3.65	1.25
Let people express their views	360	60.3%	3.66	1.07
Provide information people need to form political opinion	362	59.4%	3.58	1.26
Advocate for social change	361	35.5%	2.94	1.31
Influence public opinion	359	19.5%	2.47	1.19
Set the political agenda	359	13.6%	2.11	1.14
Promote peace and tolerance	359	35.9%	2.92	1.33
Educate the audience	361	83.7%	4.19	0.88
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	362	50.3%	3.32	1.18
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	360	62.2%	3.62	1.27
Support national development	358	23.5%	2.58	1.24
Support government policy	360	0.80%	1.33	0.69
Convey a positive image of political leaders	361	1.70%	1.20	0.59
Provide entertainment and relaxation	363	36.4%	2.94	1.30
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	362	30.9%	2.86	1.22
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	361	17.2%	2.28	1.22
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	363	48.5%	3.31	1.20
Support efforts to protect public health	361	44.0%	3.19	1.33
Counteract disinformation	360	82.5%	4.29	1.01
Discuss future implications of current events	361	65.9%	3.75	1.09

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

Journalists in Ireland demonstrate strong commitment to balance and detachment (see Table 4), with 82.6% saying journalists should let the facts speak for themselves and 75.8% strongly agreeing that “it is possible to represent objective reality in reporting”. The strongest response (89.5%) was evident in the journalists’ belief in the need to alert audiences when a source’s claim is untruthful.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	363	72.7%	3.75	0.82
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	362	34.8%	2.93	1.04
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	363	17.6%	2.42	1.00
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	363	17.1%	2.39	1.00
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	360	75.8%	3.79	0.85
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what’s true and what’s not	363	27.0%	2.74	1.00
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	363	82.6%	3.96	0.75
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	363	36.6%	2.98	1.12
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	363	35.5%	2.95	1.13
Journalists should alert audiences when a source’s claim is untruthful	361	89.5%	4.33	0.75

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 Ireland have moderate agreement with overarching statements regarding ethical content, suggesting that some decision-making is still depending on the situation and specific circumstances (see Table 5). Nevertheless, there is resistance – with fewer than one in five agreeing – that ethics come down to personal judgment. In terms of specific scenarios, there was low support for many of the controversial reporting methods presented in Table 6, such as only 2.2% saying it was always justified/justified on occasion to accept money from sources. Respondents found it much more acceptable to use hidden recording devices, and to use confidential documents or personal material of powerful people.

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	361	53.5%	3.42	1.12
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	363	60.6%	3.48	1.03
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	361	34.6%	2.88	1.16
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	361	18.6%	2.35	1.13

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	362	0.0%	46.1%
Using hidden recording devices	363	1.1%	75.8%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	362	14.4%	71.5%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	363	5.5%	73.6%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	363	0.3%	43.5%
Paying people for confidential information	363	1.4%	30.0%
Accepting money from sources	361	0.3%	1.9%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	362	0.6%	28.7%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	363	0.3%	7.4%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	361	0.0%	17.7%

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

Irish journalists’ attitudes towards the level of autonomy and freedom they have in their work was broadly consistent across all three indicators, with around two-thirds suggesting they have a great deal or complete freedom in selecting news stories, in deciding what to emphasise, and in their assessment of overall media freedom in Ireland.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	363	63.4%	3.63	0.83
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	363	69.4%	3.75	0.79
Media freedom in Ireland	357	66.1%	3.65	0.67

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

The single most influential factor for Irish journalists was journalism ethics, with two-thirds stating they were very/extremely influential on their work. Other highly ranked influences were editorial supervisors and higher editors, time limits, access to information, and media laws and regulations. On the lower end, religious groups and institutions, and friends, acquaintances and family were not deemed particularly relevant, while journalists also said they resisted commercial pressures such as advertising considerations and profit expectations.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	329	30.4%	2.93	0.97
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	345	53.9%	3.44	1.01
The business managers of the news organization	273	9.9%	1.92	1.08
The owners of the news organization	255	14.1%	1.96	1.21
Editorial policy	337	44.2%	3.16	1.18
Advertising considerations	246	8.1%	1.83	1.04
Profit expectations	235	8.9%	1.86	1.08
Audience research and data	321	23.4%	2.67	1.10
Availability of news-gathering resources	328	38.4%	3.12	1.10
Time limits	338	50.9%	3.40	1.10
Journalism ethics	339	65.5%	3.67	1.10
Self-censorship	291	21.0%	2.28	1.25
Personal values and beliefs	322	28.9%	2.73	1.20
Colleagues in other media	336	8.0%	2.22	0.91
Friends, acquaintances and family	319	6.9%	1.98	0.90
Feedback from the audience	355	17.5%	2.55	0.98
Competing news organizations	348	13.8%	2.51	0.94
Media laws and regulation	348	54.3%	3.50	1.16
Access to information	348	60.1%	3.61	1.01
Government censorship	256	9.4%	1.65	1.07
Government officials	280	7.1%	1.76	1.00
Politicians	285	8.8%	1.84	1.04
Business people	278	8.6%	1.69	1.01
Public relations	320	8.1%	1.90	1.01
Relationships with news sources	328	31.4%	2.82	1.15
Police	247	7.7%	1.73	1.00
Issue advocacy groups	297	10.8%	2.05	1.00
Scientists or health experts	300	25.3%	2.57	1.15
Religious groups and institutions	240	1.7%	1.37	0.68

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.)