

Italy

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2022, Italy has been governed by a center-right Government led by Giorgia Meloni as its Prime Minister. She is the first female Prime Minister in Italian history. Meloni promotes a conservative agenda that privileges, for instance, tough measures against immigration, balanced by a “moderate” attitude linked to European Union issues. With center-right Government the tension between Government and journalism is usually higher.

Historically, the Italian media system has been characterized by its close ties to political power, which implies a low development of journalistic professionalization and a correspondence between news outlets and political divisions within society. Given that context, the coverage is known for being highly opinionated and influenced by politicians’ statements. Although television remains popular, it has been losing its centrality with the rise of new digital sources.

During Meloni’s Government, diverse controversies involved the public broadcaster RAI. Journalists have been reporting a growing intrusion from officials into the service, including accusations of censorship denied by the Government. Additionally, reports from media freedom institutions and the European Commission demonstrated concerns about press freedom in Italy, especially in relation to media ownership and legal threats to journalists.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Our sample included 648 Italian journalists, of whom 59.1% were men and 40.9% were women. On average, they were 46.9 years old (SD = 9.6, Median = 48). The majority of them had a bachelor’s degree or equivalent (36.0%) or a master’s degree or equivalent (36.1%). Other 13.3% completed high school, while 9.9% have some university studies but no degree, and 4.2% have completed a doctorate. 55.7% of the respondents said they had some kind of formal education or professional training in journalism, from which 59.2% went to a university or college, 79.1% did journalism apprenticeships, and 59% did short-term courses.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

Italian journalists interviewed have been working in the field for an average of 19.8 years (SD = 9.74, Median = 19.00). Every week, they spend an average of 45.0 hours at work (SD = 10.7, Median = 40; those in full-time employment) in organizations focused on newspaper publishing (32.3%), magazine companies (26.6%), internet native outlets (16%), TV stations (13.1%), news agencies (5.4%), and radio stations (3.0%). Other 3.5% claimed to have no main employer, and 0.2% said they work in telecommunications.

The companies journalists work for are mostly national (63.6%), followed by regional (16.8%) and local media (19.6%). Regarding ownership, 74.4% work for private or commercial media, 12.6% are employed by public service media, 7.7% by community media, and 5.2% by non-profit media. Most of them perform middle management roles in the newsroom (48.2%), while 35.1% have no management role, and 16.7% occupy top positions. In their working routine, most of them do not have specific beats (59.7%, against 40.3% who cover subject areas).

Additionally, the majority of our sample (59.6%) has some kind of contract with the employee, either full-time permanent (53.9%), full-time fixed term (2.5%), part-time fixed term (1.7%), or part-time permanent (1.5%). Conversely, 40.4% are freelancers or self-employed. Either way, on average, 91.1% of their work-related income comes from journalism (SD = 10.2, Median = 95). More than half of the interviewees are not members of unions (64.6%).

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Italian journalists report rarely or never being victims of most safety issues mapped by our survey. Having their work publicly discredited (14.3%) or demeaning or hateful speech directed at them (12.9%) are the threats with the highest percentages registered in the “often” and “very often” categories. On the other hand, 98.4% of the journalists say they never experienced arrests, detentions, or imprisonment, while 92.9% and 91.3% say they have never experienced sexual assaults or sexual harassment or other physical attacks, respectively. Nevertheless, 79.4% are concerned with the impunity of those who harm journalists, and 56.6% worry about their mental and emotional well-being (Table 2).

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	645	4.5%	8.4%	28.7%	20.0%	38.4%
Public discrediting of your work	644	5.4%	8.9%	28.3%	18.8%	38.7%
Surveillance	600	2.0%	3.5%	11.2%	12.0%	71.3%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	638	0.8%	1.1%	3.8%	7.8%	86.5%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	645	0.0%	0.2%	0.2%	1.2%	98.4%
Legal actions against you because of your work	643	1.1%	3.1%	12.6%	12.9%	70.3%
Stalking	645	0.8%	0.9%	5.0%	8.4%	85.0%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	645	1.4%	2.0%	10.5%	24.3%	61.7%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	645	0.5%	0.5%	2.6%	3.6%	92.9%
Other physical attacks	641	0.5%	0.0%	1.2%	7.0%	91.3%

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	626	42.9%	3.17	1.27
Concerned about physical well-being	634	42.7%	3.08	1.26
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	634	56.6%	3.40	1.26
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Italy go unpunished	637	79.4%	4.08	0.94

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

The survey demonstrates that Italian journalists are strongly committed to aspects related to the monitorial role, with an emphasis on counteracting disinformation (Mean = 4.48) and being a detached observer (Mean = 4.41). Providing analysis of current affairs (Mean = 4.13) and shining a light on society's problems (Mean = 4.04) also appear as important roles. Conversely, two items of the collaborative role have the lowest means: support government policy (Mean = 1.78) and convey a positive image of political leaders (Mean = 1.42).

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	643	85.9%	4.41	0.87
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	634	60.8%	3.60	1.27
Shine a light on society's problems	644	74.6%	4.04	1.08
Motivate people to participate in politics	631	23.1%	2.62	1.23
Provide analysis of current affairs	641	79.1%	4.13	0.91
Let people express their views	637	59.2%	3.71	1.17
Provide information people need to form political opinion	630	61.9%	3.63	1.32
Advocate for social change	629	53.8%	3.48	1.22
Influence public opinion	628	19.5%	2.49	1.14
Set the political agenda	629	11.9%	2.18	1.08
Promote peace and tolerance	631	54.2%	3.49	1.31
Educate the audience	625	46.4%	3.31	1.25
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	636	50.4%	3.43	1.14
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	629	51.5%	3.38	1.30
Support national development	631	42.8%	3.19	1.20
Support government policy	609	6.6%	1.78	0.96
Convey a positive image of political leaders	616	1.9%	1.42	0.72
Provide entertainment and relaxation	637	23.8%	2.55	1.29
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	642	46.3%	3.35	1.19
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	634	30.9%	2.92	1.17
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	640	46.1%	3.34	1.16
Support efforts to protect public health	629	62.5%	3.69	1.25
Counteract disinformation	638	87.3%	4.48	0.87

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

Two statements regarding journalistic epistemology have greater adherence among Italian journalists. On the one hand, 62.7% agree or strongly agree that it is possible to represent objective reality through reporting. Interestingly, 57.8% have the same position regarding the idea that interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts. This second result resonates with the low agreement with the statement that things are either true or false, with no in-between (25.6%).

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	633	57.8%	3.49	0.98
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	634	36.2%	3.06	1.04
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	637	31.2%	2.84	1.06
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	637	25.6%	2.70	1.11
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	636	62.7%	3.60	0.93

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

Our interviewees adhere mainly to the idea that what is ethical in their work should always be determined by professional standards (Mean = 3.98), but they also agree to reconsider these standards in extraordinary circumstances (Mean = 3.01). For 67.7%, using hidden recording devices as a reporting method can be justified on occasion. Other 56.1% think the same about using confidential business or government documents without authorization, and 50.5% have this view concerning the use of personal materials of powerful people without their permission.

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	619	75.6%	3.98	0.99
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	603	39.2%	3.01	1.12
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	614	17.3%	2.32	1.12
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	625	5.3%	1.70	0.89

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	633	1.4%	46.0%
Using hidden recording devices	635	6.6%	67.7%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	629	13.4%	56.1%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	624	8.2%	50.5%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	632	0.8%	25.5%
Paying people for confidential information	636	1.4%	27.5%
Accepting money from sources	639	0.3%	2.2%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	633	5.7%	31.3%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	634	1.6%	18.0%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	639	0.3%	15.0%

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

More than half of the Italian journalists interviewed feel they have a great deal or complete freedom for selecting news stories (52.8%) and deciding which aspects to emphasize in their work (59.3%). Nevertheless, only 25.7% feel that the media has a great deal or complete freedom in Italy.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	645	52.8%	3.53	0.88
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	644	59.3%	3.65	0.87
Media freedom in Italy	641	25.7%	2.88	0.85

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Italian journalists perceive external and internal influences on their work as slightly to moderately strong (see the means in Table 8). According to our interviewees, the stronger ones are internal factors: editorial policy (Mean = 3.77), journalism ethics (Mean = 3.74), business managers of news organizations (Mean = 3.71), and time limits (Mean = 3.65). The only external influence that has a mean above 3.50 is access to information (Mean = 3.69).

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	622	38.1%	3.11	1.13
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	611	51.0%	3.39	1.09
The business managers of the news organization	607	62.6%	3.71	1.14
The owners of the news organization	609	51.5%	3.40	1.32
Editorial policy	622	65.6%	3.77	1.01
Advertising considerations	620	36.3%	2.91	1.40
Profit expectations	601	40.1%	3.02	1.33
Audience research and data	601	37.1%	3.09	1.15
Availability of news-gathering resources	604	49.7%	3.38	1.09
Time limits	623	60.5%	3.65	1.04
Journalism ethics	623	62.2%	3.74	1.11
Self-censorship	576	21.7%	2.61	1.15
Personal values and beliefs	628	50.3%	3.43	1.15
Colleagues in other media	618	10.3%	2.19	1.04
Friends, acquaintances and family	614	3.1%	1.66	0.87
Feedback from the audience	634	31.3%	2.86	1.13
Competing news organizations	622	17.5%	2.38	1.13
Media laws and regulation	624	34.4%	2.91	1.23
Access to information	625	66.6%	3.69	1.05
Government censorship	595	13.8%	1.92	1.18
Government officials	594	8.8%	1.70	1.07
Politicians	600	11.7%	1.85	1.14
Business people	603	13.3%	1.99	1.18
Public relations	626	33.6%	2.87	1.23
Relationships with news sources	626	56.9%	3.47	1.18
Police	595	24.2%	2.34	1.36
Issue advocacy groups	595	15.1%	2.14	1.18
Scientists or health experts	613	37.7%	2.95	1.29

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.)