

Kosovo

KENNETH ANDRESEN & ABIT HOXHA

INTRODUCTION

Kosovo as one of the youngest countries in Europe has managed to develop a pluralistic media landscape despite economic, political and social challenges that have followed the country ever since the declaration of independence in 2008. Kosovo's political challenges remain on the international arena, mostly struggling for recognition, and at home with a polarized political landscape and fragile relation with Serb minority. With limited foreign investments and difficult relations with international actors such as the EU, due to lack of progress in the dialogue with Serbia, Kosovo has slowed down in its progress.

Economically, Kosovo has made modest progress, but the challenge of high unemployment remains visibly as one of the main challenges, particularly among youth. Kosovo demographics is also suffering from population decline also due to youth emigration. The Kosovo economy also relies heavily on diaspora remittances.

Socially, Kosovo faces issues with ethnic conflict, polarization, corruption, a weak education system and limited health infrastructure. Socially, the country faces persistent issues such as corruption, a strained education system, and limited healthcare infrastructure. Ethnic divisions, especially between Albanians and Serbs, remain a significant barrier to integration and national unity.

Kosovo's journalistic tradition is relatively young, with independent journalism emerging only in the 1990s. This development was heavily influenced by international media coverage of the Kosovo conflict and the 1999 war. The first independent media outlets appeared in the mid-1990s, and their numbers grew rapidly after the war, including a surge in radio stations, television channels, and newspapers. In recent years, the COVID-19 lockdown and rapid technological advancement have marked the end of traditional print newspapers, prompting a shift toward web-based publications and a media model centered on digital platforms for content distribution.

Kosovo is currently experiencing one of its most significant declines in media freedom. Journalists face increasing pressure and restricted access to information from government institutions. In some cases, senior officials have publicly labeled journalists as "collaborators with the enemy," a rhetoric that fuels online harassment and incites hateful commentary. This hostile environment poses serious threats to journalists' safety and undermines their ability to report freely and effectively.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

In Kosovo, 56.6% of journalists are women and 43.3% are men. A large majority of 91.6% hold a college or university degree, while only 8.4% have no formal higher education.

The journalist workforce in Kosovo is notably young, with an average of just 4.1 years of professional experience. This reflects the country's broader demographic profile, as well as the tendency for journalism to serve as a starting point in young professionals' careers. Many move on to other roles after gaining a few years of experience in the media. Only 24% of surveyed journalists have more than 10 years of experience in the profession.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In Kosovo, a majority of journalists (94.9%) are formally employed, while only 5.1% operate as freelancers. Despite this high employment rate, job precarity remains a significant issue. Only 16% of journalists report having permanent contracts, whereas an overwhelming 84% are employed on non-permanent contracts. This widespread contractual instability points to broader structural challenges within the media labor market, particularly with respect to job security and long-term career development. This also explains the migration of journalists in short time from journalism to other professions. Furthermore, 91.3% of journalists work full-time, with just 8.7% in part-time roles, suggesting a high level of professional commitment.

A substantial proportion of journalists (73.4%) rely exclusively on journalism as their primary source of income. However, 26.6% report having additional income streams, which may reflect the need to supplement modest earnings in the sector or a diversification of professional activities. Regarding media ownership and affiliation, 64.9% of journalists are employed by private or commercial media outlets. In contrast, 10.8% work for Public Service Media and an additional 4.1% for explicitly state-run media institutions. This distinction is analytically relevant considering the political influence in the public broadcaster, particularly in Kosovo's context where the public broadcaster is state-funded.

In terms of newsroom hierarchies, 63% of journalists do not occupy any managerial position. Middle management roles, such as section editors or department heads are held by 32% of respondents, while only 5% report occupying senior leadership or top management positions.

Professional unionization appears relatively robust, with 62.6% of journalists indicating membership in a union or professional association. However, 37.4% remain unaffiliated, pointing to potential gaps in collective representation or access to labor protections.

The geographic distribution of media work is also notable: 84.5% of respondents are employed by national-level media outlets, while only 11.9% work in local or regional media. This disparity is likely a function of Kosovo’s small territorial size and the high concentration of media infrastructure, resources, and audiences in the capital, Prishtina.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Most journalists report various threats, and a notable portion still faces frequent hostility. Over half (52%) have experienced demeaning or hateful speech, with nearly 6.2% facing it often or very often. Public discrediting is also common (32.9%). More severe forms of intimidation in the form of surveillance (26.2%), hacking (25.4%), and other threats (25.9%), are less frequent but still present. Physical and legal threats are rare: arrests (10.1%), legal actions (15%), and physical attacks (11.4%) are occasionally experienced. The most extreme cases, such as abductions (0.4%), stalking (3.5%), or coercion (3.1%), are not at a high rate but are present. Meanwhile, workplace bullying (1.8%), sexual harassment (9.2%), and moral questioning (18%) show considerable occurrence. Overall, the findings suggest that while serious threats are uncommon, many journalists still face verbal abuse, digital harassment, and reputational attacks with some regularity.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	227	1.8%	4.4%	18.1%	23.8%	52.0%
Public discrediting of your work	228	0.0%	0.9%	6.6%	25.4%	67.1%
Surveillance	229	1.3%	4.8%	7.9%	12.2%	73.8%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	228	0.0%	0.9%	5.3%	19.3%	74.6%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	227	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	8.8%	89.9%
Legal actions against you because of your work	227	0.0%	0.4%	1.3%	13.2%	85.0%
Stalking	228	0.0%	0.4%	0.9%	2.2%	96.5%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	228	0.4%	0.4%	9.6%	15.4%	74.1%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	228	0.0%	0.9%	2.2%	6.1%	90.8%
Other physical attacks	228	0.4%	0.0%	2.6%	8.3%	88.6%
Coercion	228	0.4%	0.0%	0.4%	2.2%	96.9%
Questioning of your personal morality	228	0.9%	0.0%	2.6%	14.5%	82.0%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	228	0.0%	0.4%	2.6%	5.7%	91.2%
Others disseminating your personal information	228	0.0%	0.4%	3.1%	8.8%	87.7%
Workplace bullying	228	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	0.9%	98.2%
Abductions	229	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	99.6%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	228	0.4%	0.0%	0.4%	0.9%	98.2%
Intimidation that targets family	229	0.0%	0.4%	0.4%	7.4%	91.7%

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	223	16.6%	2.41	1.18
Concerned about physical well-being	223	22.9%	2.54	1.17
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	226	40.7%	3.07	1.22
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Kosovo go unpunished	225	73.8%	4.04	0.97

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

Nearly all respondents consider monitoring those in power (87.6%), promoting peace and tolerance (90.3%), shining light on societal problems (85.5%), speaking on behalf of the marginalized (80.6%), and countering disinformation (90.1%) as very or extremely important. These roles also received high mean scores (M = 4.0 – 4.5), reflecting strong normative commitment.

Roles related to public education and civic engagement also scored highly, including educating the audience (78.2%), supporting public health (81.3%), and discussing future implications of events (79.1%). Meanwhile, analytical and expressive functions, such as providing analysis (48.9%), letting people express views (62.8%), and influencing opinion (47.3%), were seen as moderately important (M = 3.0 – 4.0).

By contrast, instrumental or partisan roles, like supporting government policy (6.2%), setting the political agenda (22.4%), and conveying a positive image of leaders (8.5%), were rated lowest, both in importance and mean scores (M = 1.8–2.3). This reflects a professional attitude of journalists being more aligned with critical independence and public service than with loyalty to power or commercial interests.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	224	81.7%	4.26	1.05
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	226	87.6%	4.42	0.94
Shine a light on society's problems	227	85.5%	4.38	0.93
Motivate people to participate in politics	225	22.7%	2.39	1.29
Provide analysis of current affairs	225	48.9%	3.38	1.23
Let people express their views	226	62.8%	3.92	0.89
Provide information people need to form political opinion	227	45.4%	3.22	1.39
Advocate for social change	227	73.1%	4.00	0.97
Influence public opinion	224	47.3%	3.46	1.19
Set the political agenda	223	22.4%	2.39	1.40
Promote peace and tolerance	226	90.3%	4.54	0.77
Educate the audience	225	78.2%	4.24	0.89
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	225	65.7%	3.97	1.11
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	226	80.6%	4.25	1.03
Support national development	224	55.8%	3.60	1.09
Support government policy	225	6.2%	1.93	1.08
Convey a positive image of political leaders	224	8.5%	1.83	1.09
Provide entertainment and relaxation	224	23.7%	2.96	1.10
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	225	36.9%	3.12	1.10
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	224	25.4%	2.96	1.06
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	224	29.5%	2.86	1.13
Support efforts to protect public health	225	81.3%	4.26	0.97
Counteract disinformation	223	90.1%	4.54	0.87
Discuss future implications of current events	210	79.0%	4.13	0.92

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

The data reveal a complex view of epistemologies in Kosovo. A significant share (33.6%) agree that interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts ($M = 3.82$), suggesting recognition of journalism as an interpretive act rather than a purely neutral one. Still, a notable number support the idea that facts should speak for themselves (28.9%, $M = 3.61$), reflecting a polarized journalistic landscape as well.

Belief in absolute truths appears limited: only 10.3% agree that things are either true or false, with no in-between ($M = 3.00$), and just 14.8% believe it's possible to represent objective reality ($M = 3.35$). Meanwhile, very few endorse subjectivist positions such as trusting one's instincts (3.2%, $M = 2.53$), relying on intuition (2.5%, $M = 2.27$), or making one's standpoint transparent (7.4%, $M = 2.46$).

Strong rejection of the claim that truth is shaped by those in power (0.5%, $M = 1.86$) and that journalists cannot separate personal beliefs from reporting (0.9%, $M = 2.17$) suggests a continued belief in journalistic independence and professional reporting. Overall, journalists appear to hold a pragmatic understanding of truth: they value accuracy and facts, yet acknowledge that some interpretation is necessary to construct meaning from facts.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	223	33.6%	3.82	1.06
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	222	0.5%	1.86	0.86
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	223	0.9%	2.17	0.88
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	224	10.3%	3.00	0.14
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	223	14.8%	3.35	1.13
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	190	3.2%	2.53	1.14
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	197	2.5%	2.27	1.00
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	204	28.9%	3.61	1.15
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	204	3.4%	2.30	1.09
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	203	7.4%	2.46	1.17
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	206	6.3%	2.56	1.25

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

Respondents in Kosovo advocate a rule-based approach to journalism ethics reflecting also the contemporary calls for more stronger ethical guidelines. Over half (53.5%) agree that professional standards should always guide decisions (M = 4.14). Few support flexibility: 9.7% agree that standards may be set aside in extraordinary cases (M = 3.14), and even fewer favor situational (1.8%, M = 2.48) or personal judgment (M = 1.95). Overall, journalists largely reject relativism in favor of shared professional norms.

The data suggest that journalists are generally cautious about ethically controversial practices. Some methods are seen as occasionally justifiable, particularly when serving the public interest. For example, using hidden recording devices (54.1%) and unauthorized access to powerful individuals' personal materials (42.2%) or government documents (39.4%) are justified on occasion by a significant share of respondents. However, few see these practices as always justified (mostly under 10%).

By contrast, deceptive or commercially compromised practices – such as accepting money from sources (2.3%), disguised promotional content (0.9%), or publishing unverified information (1.8%) – receive minimal justification, indicating strong ethical boundaries. Notably, claiming a false identity is only justified in high rate by 32.9%, with just 6.8% seeing it as always acceptable. Overall, the findings show that while some investigative tactics are tolerated under specific conditions, journalists strongly reject practices that compromise integrity, transparency, or public trust.

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	228	72.4%	4.14	1.12
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	226	34.5%	3.14	1.06
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	227	11.9%	2.48	1.00
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	227	2.2%	1.95	0.90

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	222	6.8%	32.9%
Using hidden recording devices	222	12.6%	54.1%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	221	9.0%	39.4%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	223	9.0%	42.2%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	221	2.3%	26.7%
Paying people for confidential information	224	6.7%	27.2%
Accepting money from sources	222	2.3%	3.2%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	221	2.7%	6.3%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	222	0.9%	8.1%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	221	1.8%	10.4%

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

Journalists in Kosovo have a high individual professional autonomy. An overwhelming majority of respondents report having a great deal or complete freedom when it comes to selecting news stories (90.8%) and deciding which aspects to emphasize (91.7%, M = 4.40 and 4.39). These high ratings suggest that journalists feel empowered to make editorial judgments independently, reinforcing a perception of control over their immediate work.

However, when asked about overall media freedom in their country, the perception is noticeably more restrained. Just 54.1% of respondents report a high level of national media freedom, and the mean score drops to 3.64 (SD = 0.84). This gap between personal editorial freedom and structural media freedom suggests that while journalists may operate with relative independence in their day-to-day tasks, they also recognize broader systemic or institutional constraints including legal, political, or economic challenges which affect 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	230	90.8%	4.40	0.66
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	230	91.7%	4.39	0.65
Media freedom in Kosovo	222	54.1%	3.64	0.84

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Journalists in Kosovo perceive their daily work as shaped primarily by professional norms and logistical realities, rather than by ideological or external pressure. The data illustrate a complex landscape of influences on journalistic work, with practical constraints and ethical standards playing the most important roles. The most influential factor reported was access to information (73.3% "very/extremely influential", $M = 3.86$), followed by time limits (61.9%, $M = 3.73$), and journalism ethics (50.5%, $M = 3.53$). Institutional and political influences, such as media laws (41.5%), government officials (42.3%), and government censorship (45.8%), are perceived as moderately influential ($M = 3.1 - 3.2$), pointing to an environment where state actors still exert a notable impact.

In contrast, commercial pressures, such as advertising (11.6%), profit expectations (13.9%), and business managers (11.1%), are generally rated lower ($M = 2.3$), suggesting that direct financial influence is less acutely felt by journalists – at least from their own perspective. Peer influence appears limited: only 8.9% consider newsroom peers highly influential ($M = 2.16$), and even editors and editorial policy show only moderate influence ($M = 2.9 - 3.0$). Similarly, external actors like scientists, religious groups, the military, and extremist groups received extremely low influence, both in perception of influence and mean scores (mostly $M < 1.5$).

The data portray journalism as a profession guided foremost by ethical commitments, resource availability, and structural constraints, with political and economic actors exerting secondary influence, and ideological or peer pressures playing relatively minor roles.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	213	8.9%	2.16	1.03
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	218	31.2%	2.97	1.10
The business managers of the news organization	216	11.1%	2.28	1.04
The owners of the news organization	214	16.4%	2.48	1.09
Editorial policy	218	28.4%	2.96	1.06
Advertising considerations	208	11.6%	2.28	1.13
Profit expectations	209	13.9%	2.30	1.23
Audience research and data	204	34.8%	3.05	1.21
Availability of news-gathering resources	212	39.6%	3.25	1.09
Time limits	218	61.9%	3.73	1.08
Journalism ethics	218	50.5%	3.53	1.36
Self-censorship	210	11.9%	2.32	1.08
Personal values and beliefs	205	22.0%	2.77	1.18
Colleagues in other media	215	2.3%	1.87	0.91
Friends, acquaintances and family	217	4.6%	2.00	0.94
Feedback from the audience	217	26.3%	2.67	1.17
Competing news organizations	214	13.1%	2.25	1.15
Media laws and regulation	217	41.5%	3.18	1.27
Access to information	217	73.3%	3.86	1.07
Government censorship	212	45.8%	3.14	1.30
Government officials	213	42.3%	3.08	1.41
Politicians	216	39.9%	2.83	1.53
Business people	214	27.1%	2.52	1.40
Public relations	217	32.7%	2.94	1.25
Relationships with news sources	216	35.2%	3.00	1.24
Police	212	9.0%	1.85	1.04
Issue advocacy groups	205	2.0%	1.80	0.91
Scientists or health experts	194	7.2%	1.77	1.01
Religious groups and institutions	170	0.6%	1.28	0.63
Military	162	1.8%	1.15	0.56
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	162	0.6%	1.07	0.34
Organized crime and criminal groups	161	0.6%	1.16	0.55
Terrorist groups	164	0.6%	1.12	0.45

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.)