

# New Zealand

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## INTRODUCTION

New Zealand is a democratic country in the Westminster (British) tradition and still retains a stable democracy and free press. In 2023, a conservative coalition took power, which has sought to promote a more conservative economic and social agenda, though much milder than that in the US, reflecting NZ's generally social-democratic orientation. The government cancelled a proposal to merge state radio and TV broadcasters, has enacted cuts to public broadcasting funding, and resisted calls from media organisations to intervene to force tech giants to pay for news, as Australia and Canada has done. In the past two years there has been a significant shrinkage in news organisations and jobs, with cuts at the state TV broadcaster, TVNZ, the closure of the only private TV broadcaster, TV3, and several rounds of cuts at the two major private news organisations, NZME and Stuff. There have been repeated calls for Government action to support journalism, and in the recent 2025 Government budget allocated \$6.4m over four years to support court and council reporting, but also cut \$18 million (7% of its budget) from the main state radio broadcaster, RNZ, saying it needed to do more to address declining public trust levels. There is also a proposal to streamline regulation of state broadcasting funding. Journalists are concerned about a developing trend to marginalize them through increasing use of direct communication with audiences through social media, and reduced access to government officials, as well increasing online abuse of journalists. There has also been no progress in reforming New Zealand's conservative approach to press freedom; its high use of court news suppression orders, numerous exemptions to freedom of information laws, strict libel laws, privacy legislation, and court censorship.

## BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Our sample of NZ journalists was predominantly female (58%) to 41.3% male, reflecting the gradual feminization of the profession here over the past 20 years. The mean age was 45.9 years (SD = 14.8) and the Median age 47 years. Over half (52.6%) have a Bachelor's Degree or equivalent, almost a quarter have a Master's degree (23.9%), and a few (1.9%) have a PhD. Only 8.3% have only high school education or less, while 13.8 percent have done some university study without completing a degree. Most (81.8%) have had formal training in journalism, with most of those (57.2%) getting it at university or college and the rest (40.2%) through apprenticeship or cadetship, while many (70.2%) have also done short-term courses.

## JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In terms of the background of their main employers, a smallish number of journalists (13.1%) worked for native online media, 40.1% for newspapers, 11.9% for radio outlets, and 16.8% for television, respectively. Very few journalists worked for magazine companies (7.3%) or news agencies (5.5%). Finally, 5.2% of the interviewed journalists claimed not to have a main employer. Regarding area of coverage, 78.4% of the journalists reported they mainly worked for (trans)national media, while 21.6% primarily catered to local or regional media.

On average, New Zealand journalists had 18.7 years of professional experience (SD = 13.8; Median = 15.5). A majority of them (65.3%) worked on a variety of beats or subject areas rather than on a single one. Less than half of New Zealand journalists (43.6%) were members of professional associations.

About three quarters of the interviewed journalists in New Zealand had a full-time contract (75.4% permanently and 4.7% temporarily employed). About a tenth (10.9%) worked as freelancers or were self-employed, and an additional 2.7% had other forms of employment. Finally, 5.3% had a part-time permanent contract, and 0.9% had a part-time temporary contract. While most have steady employment, most (87.3%) rely on other income besides journalism.

The average working week of New Zealand full-time journalists was 43.3 hours (SD = 8.3; Median = 42). Relatedly, 58.3% of the respondents reported they felt stressed out at work often or very often during the previous six months; only 7.1% had never or rarely felt that way.

## SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Verbal attacks such as demeaning or hateful speech or public discrediting of journalists' work or questioning of journalists' morality were the most common safety threats experienced by New Zealand journalists (see Table 1). A small but disturbing number (5%) had experienced threats or intimidation, and sexual harassment (1.8%). Experiences of more dangerous threats, such as legal actions or physical threats, were rare. These experiences also impact the concerns expressed by New Zealand journalists; almost a quarter (22.8%) were concerned about losing their job, and a broad majority were concerned about their physical or emotional well-being (see Table 2). Moreover, over half of the surveyed journalists feared that those who harm journalists would go unpunished.

**TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS**

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	338	13.9%	21.9%	34.0%	21.3%	8.9%
Public discrediting of your work	337	8.9%	18.4%	33.2%	23.1%	16.3%
Surveillance	336	1.2%	3.0%	11.9%	17.0%	67.0%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	338	1.2%	3.3%	7.4%	16.3%	71.9%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	338	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	4.1%	95.6%
Legal actions against you because of your work	338	0.3%	1.2%	9.8%	26.6%	62.1%
Stalking	338	0.3%	0.3%	7.4%	14.8%	77.2%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	338	5.0%	7.4%	23.7%	25.4%	38.5%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	338	1.8%	3.0%	5.3%	10.4%	79.6%
Other physical attacks	338	0.3%	0.6%	1.8%	11.8%	85.5%
Coercion	338	0.3%	0.6%	7.4%	14.8%	76.9%
Questioning of your personal morality	338	12.1%	15.1%	30.5%	22.2%	20.1%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	338	0.3%	1.5%	3.0%	5.9%	89.3%
Others disseminating your personal information	338	1.2%	2.4%	8.0%	17.5%	71.0%
Workplace bullying	338	2.4%	5.9%	14.2%	21.9%	55.6%
Abductions	338	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	99.1%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	338	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	2.4%	97.3%
Intimidation that targets family	338	0.0%	0.6%	3.6%	6.5%	89.3%

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	338	22.8%	2.52	1.17
Concerned about physical well-being	338	24.3%	2.46	1.18
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	338	46.7%	3.15	1.22
Concerned that those who harm journalists in New Zealand go unpunished	337	51.9%	3.37	1.04

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 roles that New Zealand journalists believe most important are to shine a light on social problems, and be a watchdog, and educate the public. Almost three quarters of all journalists rated these three roles extremely important. Most, but not much more than half, believe in the neutral/observer role, while less than half (42.7%) are activists, and less than a fifth believe they should set the political agenda. Commercial or accommodator roles are not much valued, with only a quarter believing their job is to attract the largest audience. Few (13.6%) are collaborators (believing they should support government policy). Overall, New Zealand journalists are clearly altruistic; they believe strongly in the social justice, educational and accountability functions of journalism, but are less concerned with entertaining or supporting agendas.

**TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES**

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	337	58.2%	3.53	1.15
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	338	72.8%	3.92	1.26
Shine a light on society's problems	337	73.9%	3.97	1.28
Motivate people to participate in politics	338	26.3%	2.76	1.20
Provide analysis of current affairs	338	54.4%	3.42	1.25
Let people express their views	338	56.8%	3.42	1.25
Provide information people need to form political opinion	338	53.3%	3.38	1.28
Advocate for social change	337	42.7%	3.16	1.32
Influence public opinion	337	24.3%	2.70	1.18
Set the political agenda	337	18.1%	2.28	1.26
Promote peace and tolerance	337	40.7%	3.12	1.30
Educate the audience	337	76.0%	3.99	1.20
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	336	51.5%	3.43	1.23
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	337	58.2%	3.55	1.27
Support national development	335	28.7%	2.80	1.24
Support government policy	337	13.6%	1.88	1.30
Convey a positive image of political leaders	338	13.0%	1.68	1.32
Provide entertainment and relaxation	338	28.4%	2.88	1.21
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	338	26.0%	2.81	1.12
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	337	21.7%	2.45	1.24
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	338	39.9%	3.14	1.19
Support efforts to protect public health	337	47.8%	3.29	1.29
Counteract disinformation	338	74.9%	3.95	1.32

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

New Zealand journalists tend to support the idea that journalists should interpret events, and most still believe it is possible to represent objective reality, and that they can withhold their personal beliefs when reporting, and that they should let the facts speak for themselves. The one thing they nearly all agree on is that they should call out untruths. Thus, while there is reasonable support for the notion that subjectivity plays a role in their journalism, they tend strongly towards objectivist goals in their work.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	337	79.5%	3.91	0.79
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	337	38.0%	3.06	0.99
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	338	32.2%	2.84	1.04
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	338	17.8%	2.46	1.00
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	338	68.6%	3.68	0.90
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	338	35.8%	2.98	1.04
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	338	18.3%	2.53	0.97
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	338	79.6%	3.94	0.76
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	338	41.7%	3.25	1.02
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	336	31.0%	2.95	1.05
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	338	92.9%	4.40	0.67

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

New Zealand journalists generally adhere to Anglo-American/ north European norms in their ethical orientation, with most support for an exceptionist orientation, but still strong support for the absolutist and situationist tendencies. They are certainly less inclined to the subjectivist approach, believing in general, that journalists should try to follow general ethical guidelines, while still preserving a strong internal compass that allows them to go their own way when they feel strongly. They believe that some controversial practices are quite acceptable, particularly those that support the watchdog role (such as using confidential documents), and particularly when used against powerful people or organisations, but they're less convinced they are justified against ordinary people. They have a strong distaste for practices that provide commercial benefit to individual journalists.

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	338	47.3%	3.25	1.12
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	338	66.0%	3.65	1.04
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	337	48.1%	3.17	1.19
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	338	20.7%	2.46	1.10

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	328	0.6%	34.8%
Using hidden recording devices	320	2.2%	73.4%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	313	12.1%	74.4%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	317	2.5%	77%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	327	1.2%	52.9%
Paying people for confidential information	325	0.3%	18.8%
Accepting money from sources	330	0.6%	0.6%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	315	0.3%	37.8%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	327	0.3%	5.8%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	326	0.3%	34.4%

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

New Zealand journalists believe they enjoy a great deal of freedom in selecting stories and deciding what should be emphasized. A strong majority believe their country enjoys a great deal of media freedom, despite the reasonably strict legal climate in New Zealand and a degree of censorship that would raise concerns in other democratic countries.

**TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM**

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	338	74.6%	3.87	0.79
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	338	74.6%	3.95	0.81
Media freedom in New Zealand	334	80.5%	3.85	0.63

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

## EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

New Zealand journalists are most influenced by professional organizational factors, such as their journalism ethics, and editorial guidance and policy. They are remarkably free of business influence on their journalism, rating their owners' influence as very low. Nor do they feel influenced by external pressures such as friends, politicians, religion or audience feedback. They do, however, feel resource constraints (such as time limits) keenly. Overall, New Zealand journalists believe strongly in their personal freedom to adhere to their conceptions of journalistic values. A particular concern is increasing difficulty in accessing information, due to increasing corporate and government restrictions on information access.

**TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES**

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	312	39.4%	3.21	1.03
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	313	64.5%	3.76	0.94
The business managers of the news organization	284	12.3%	1.98	1.12
The owners of the news organization	279	12.2%	1.96	1.16
Editorial policy	319	49.8%	3.31	1.19
Advertising considerations	267	5.6%	1.65	0.94
Profit expectations	269	10.4%	1.84	1.09
Audience research and data	305	25.2%	2.68	1.16
Availability of news-gathering resources	323	52.0%	3.41	1.08
Time limits	328	60.1%	3.63	1.03
Journalism ethics	329	70.2%	3.84	1.17
Self-censorship	294	25.9%	2.59	1.24
Personal values and beliefs	325	39.7%	3.12	1.19
Colleagues in other media	331	14.2%	2.45	1.05
Friends, acquaintances and family	325	7.4%	2.16	0.94
Feedback from the audience	334	14.1%	2.56	0.94
Competing news organizations	330	13.9%	2.46	1.00
Media laws and regulation	327	56.0%	3.48	1.16
Access to information	327	68.2%	3.84	0.89
Government censorship	277	18.4%	2.00	1.33
Government officials	304	13.8%	2.03	1.21
Politicians	304	10.5%	1.95	1.13
Business people	311	10.3%	1.94	1.07
Public relations	320	13.1%	2.09	1.12
Relationships with news sources	325	40.6%	3.17	1.17
Police	278	11.9%	2.00	1.12
Issue advocacy groups	303	12.5%	2.25	1.04
Scientists or health experts	315	34.6%	3.01	1.14
Religious groups and institutions	273	2.9%	1.48	0.81

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.)