

Paraguay

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INTRODUCTION

As of 2025, Paraguay is a relatively stable democracy in South America, politically dominated by the conservative Colorado Party, which has ruled almost uninterrupted for decades. The country's economy has seen modest growth driven by agriculture (especially soybeans and cattle) and hydroelectric power exports, but corruption and stark social inequalities remain persistent problems. Paraguay is a bilingual nation (Spanish and Guaraní) with significant rural communities and a large informal sector, factors that contribute to its unique social fabric and ongoing development challenges.

Paraguayan journalism has historically contended with authoritarian constraints and elite control. During General Alfredo Stroessner's 35-year dictatorship (1954–1989), press freedom was severely curtailed through censorship and intimidation. The return to democracy after 1989 opened up the media landscape, leading to a mix of privately-owned national outlets and smaller community media. However, ownership of major newspapers, TV, and radio networks remains highly concentrated among a few influential families allied with political and business elites. Journalists often face subtle pressures, legal harassment, and occasional censorship attempts. Despite these challenges, Paraguay's journalists have a resilient tradition of investigative reporting and public-interest journalism, contributing to a more pluralistic, if still uneven, media environment.

The fieldwork for this study was conducted between early 2022 and early 2023, as Paraguay was gearing up for general elections in April 2023. The political climate during data collection was relatively calm, with President Mario Abdo Benítez finishing his term and an expected transfer of power (ultimately won by Colorado candidate Santiago Peña). This period also marked Paraguay's gradual recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic's health and economic impacts. However, journalists remained vigilant about press freedom issues. Notably, early 2023 saw the killing of a radio reporter in a border region (who was one of the journalists we surveyed) – an incident that underscored ongoing concerns about violence against the press and the impunity often enjoyed by those who harm journalists.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Our sample of Paraguayan journalists is markedly male-dominated: only 30.7% of respondents were women. On average, they were 40.8 years old ($SD = 12.3$; Median = 39). They are generally well educated – about two-thirds (65.6%) held a bachelor's degree or equivalent, 12.1% had a master's degree, and less than 1% a doctorate. Moreover, 84.9% of the journalists reported having received formal education or professional training in journalism. This training was most commonly obtained through short-term courses (89.1%) and journalism apprenticeships or cadetships (80.8%), and to a somewhat lesser extent via university or college programs in journalism (64.6%).

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In Paraguay, radio is the most common medium employing journalists: 39.2% of our respondents worked for a radio station. Other sizable segments worked for newspapers (16.8%) or television broadcasters (14.1%), and about one in ten journalists (9.4%) were with native digital-only news outlets. Very few worked for magazines (0.7%) or telecommunications media (1.9%), and a small number were employed by news agencies (3.1%). Notably, 1.8% of journalists in the sample reported having no single main employer (e.g., those fully freelance or working across multiple outlets). Regarding the reach of their work, a slight majority (55.3%) of Paraguayan journalists catered primarily to national or transnational audiences, while 44.7% worked for local or regional media. Transnational media are prevalent in the border cities, which also have the greatest number of media outlets.

On average, Paraguayan journalists had 15.9 years of professional experience in the field ($SD = 10.0$; Median = 14). The vast majority (about 84%) reported working across various beats or subject areas rather than specializing in a single beat; only 15.9% said they focused on one specific beat. Union membership is relatively moderate: nearly half of the journalists (47.6%) were members of a professional journalists' association or union.

Just over half of the journalists (54.0%) held a full-time position (with 49.0% on a permanent full-time contract and 5.0% on a full-time fixed-term contract). Part-time employment was less common, accounting for 19.0% of journalists (14.0% on part-time permanent and 5.0% on part-time temporary contracts). A significant segment – almost one-quarter (23.2%) – worked as freelancers or were self-employed, and the remaining 3.8% had other forms of employment. These results point to some precarity in employment conditions, a point underscored by the fact that 55.5% of respondents reported having an additional job outside journalism to supplement their income. On the whole, the typical work week for a Paraguayan full-time journalist was 44.1 hours ($SD = 12.5$; Median = 45), and more than four in ten journalists said they felt stressed at work "often" or "very often" (42.6% in total, compared to 27.4% who "never" or "rarely" felt work stress).

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Verbal attacks are among the most common threats experienced by Paraguayan journalists. In particular, demeaning or hateful speech directed at them and public discrediting of their work were frequently reported forms of harassment (a large majority of journalists have faced these at least occasionally – see Table 1). By contrast, more dangerous forms of threat – while less frequently encountered – are still a cause for concern. Only small minorities of journalists reported direct experiences with legal actions, physical assaults, or other severe threats (such as arrests, property damage, or abductions), but even isolated incidents of these kinds contribute to an atmosphere of intimidation.

These experiences are reflected in journalists' work-related concerns (Table 2). About one in three Paraguayan journalists (31.5%) agreed that they worry about losing their job in the next year, and a similar proportion (35.9%) said they are concerned for their own physical safety while working. A much larger share – nearly two-thirds (64.6%) – expressed concern about their emotional and mental well-being on the job. Most strikingly, an overwhelming 96.9% of respondents agreed that those who harm journalists in Paraguay often go unpunished. In other words, virtually all Paraguayan journalists fear that impunity for attacks on the press is the norm, a perception that speaks to the environment of insecurity and lack of justice surrounding media workers.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	680	5.7%	11.6%	31.9%	24.7%	26.0%
Public discrediting of your work	679	2.5%	9.4%	20.9%	25.6%	41.5%
Surveillance	674	1.0%	4.5%	10.4%	15.4%	68.7%
Hacking or blocking of your accounts or websites	680	1.2%	2.1%	8.2%	15.0%	73.5%
Arrest, detention or imprisonment	680	0.1%	0.1%	1.0%	2.5%	96.2%
Legal actions against you because of your work	680	0.4%	0.6%	6.0%	9.1%	83.8%
Stalking	680	0.4%	2.5%	7.2%	18.7%	71.2%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	680	1.0%	3.7%	15.7%	25.9%	53.7%
Sexual harassment or sexual assault	680	0.4%	1.8%	3.8%	8.1%	85.9%
Other physical attacks	677	0.6%	0.3%	5.0%	12.9%	81.2%
Coercion	680	0.3%	1.8%	4.6%	13.4%	80.0%
Attempts to publicly question your personal morality	680	2.1%	6.0%	18.8%	26.5%	46.6%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	680	1.0%	2.4%	9.1%	15.1%	72.4%
Others disseminating your personal information	675	1.0%	3.6%	9.6%	19.4%	66.4%
Workplace bullying	680	1.2%	2.4%	6.3%	11.3%	78.8%
Abduction/kidnapping	680	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	1.3%	98.4%
Office raids, newsroom searches, or damage to work equipment	680	0.0%	0.4%	1.8%	3.5%	94.3%
Intimidation targeting your family	680	0.0%	0.3%	3.5%	10.4%	85.7%

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	677	31.5%	2.73	1.25
Concerned about physical well-being (safety) in doing my job	680	35.9%	2.75	1.28
Concerned about emotional/mental well-being in doing my job	680	64.6%	3.52	1.20
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Paraguay go unpunished	680	96.9%	4.56	0.67

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

Paraguayan journalists show very strong support for many of the normative roles of the press (see Table 3). In particular, interventionist and civic-oriented roles – such as shining a light on social problems, educating the public, promoting peace and tolerance, speaking on behalf of the marginalized, and counteracting disinformation – were rated as extremely important by an overwhelming majority of journalists. Traditional watchdog and information-providing roles also remain highly valued: for example, 87.8% said providing analysis of current affairs is very important, 79.7% emphasized the importance of monitoring those in power, and 75.3% considered it very important to act as a detached observer.

By contrast, politically assertive or partisan roles were among the least endorsed. Few journalists placed great importance on "setting the political agenda" (41.5% very/extremely important) or "conveying a positive image of political leaders" (46.8%). Even so, it is notable that even these less popular roles were deemed at least "very important" by sizable minorities of Paraguayan journalists. Meanwhile, roles related to attracting audiences – such as providing entertainment – received mixed support (54.7% rated providing entertainment as very important). Overall, the data suggest that Paraguayan journalists see themselves as active facilitators of social change and public knowledge, without entirely abandoning the classic watchdog stance, and they generally downplay overtly propagandistic functions.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/ Extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	680	75.3%	3.87	0.92
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	680	79.7%	4.13	0.90
Shine a light on society's problems	680	88.8%	4.38	0.76
Motivate people to participate in politics	680	56.6%	3.52	1.11
Provide analysis of current affairs	680	87.8%	4.26	0.75
Let people express their views	680	86.3%	4.24	0.77
Provide information people need to form political opinion	680	83.2%	4.18	0.93
Advocate for social change	680	82.1%	4.16	0.86
Influence public opinion	679	65.8%	3.77	0.94
Set the political agenda	680	41.5%	3.19	1.07
Promote peace and tolerance	680	89.3%	4.37	0.79
Educate the audience	680	89.0%	4.34	0.77
Point to possible solutions for society's problems	679	83.5%	4.16	0.75
Speak on behalf of the marginalized or voiceless	678	88.6%	4.34	0.80
Support national development	680	85.0%	4.21	0.86
Support government policy	680	61.9%	3.64	1.01
Convey a positive image of political leaders	677	46.8%	3.24	1.18
Provide entertainment and relaxation	680	54.7%	3.49	1.07
Provide news that attracts the largest audience	679	78.8%	4.04	0.90
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	679	66.7%	3.79	0.94
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	680	64.1%	3.74	0.92
Support efforts to protect public health	679	86.9%	4.25	0.89
Counteract disinformation	678	91.6%	4.49	0.73
Discuss future implications of current events	680	86.2%	4.19	0.75

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

There is some diversity of opinion among Paraguayan journalists regarding how truth and facts should be handled, but clear points of consensus emerge (see Table 4). An overwhelming majority (91.7%) agree that interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts – indicating that most journalists reject a purely “just the facts” approach in favor of providing context and analysis. At the same time, a similarly large majority believes in classic objectivity norms: for instance, 75.4% agree that it is possible to report objective reality, and 77.1% say journalists should let the facts “speak for themselves.” There is near-unanimous support for transparency and verification: over 90% of journalists think reporters should make their own standpoint transparent in their work, and 91.4% agree that journalists must alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful.

By contrast, relatively few Paraguayan journalists subscribe to a strongly relativistic or subjectivist view of truth. Only 20.3% agreed that “truth is inevitably shaped by those in power,” suggesting most reject the notion that truth is purely a construct of power. Likewise, less than half (46.3%) believe it is impossible for journalists to keep their personal beliefs out of their reporting – meaning a slight majority feel that neutrality or separating personal bias is achievable. There is also broad skepticism of purely intuitive newsgathering: most journalists do not endorse statements like “journalists should trust their instincts to decide what's true” (only 40.1% agree) or “journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be from the start” (33.0% agree). In sum, Paraguayan journalists tend to espouse a pragmatic epistemology that values factual truth and objectivity, while also recognizing the importance of interpretation and transparency in the journalistic process.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	678	91.7%	4.21	0.79
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	680	20.3%	2.50	1.04
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	680	46.3%	3.20	1.07
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	680	59.3%	3.50	1.10
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	679	75.4%	3.75	0.98
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	679	40.1%	3.06	1.11
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	679	33.0%	2.88	1.05
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	678	77.1%	3.88	0.84
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	680	62.4%	3.56	1.02
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	679	90.3%	4.17	0.75
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	678	91.4%	4.24	0.74

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

Paraguayan journalists strongly emphasize adherence to professional ethical standards over subjective or situational ethics (see Table 5). An overwhelming 89.4% agree that what is ethical “should always be determined by professional standards regardless of situation and personal judgment.” Conversely, there is little support for more relativistic ethical stances: only 30.7% say ethics should depend on each specific situation, and 41.3% think that ethical decisions should be left to personal judgment. Even the compromise view – following professional standards *unless* extraordinary circumstances require otherwise – is only endorsed by 43.4%. These figures indicate a clear normative consensus that journalists in Paraguay should follow established professional codes of ethics strictly in all cases.

When it comes to justifying controversial reporting methods, Paraguayan journalists draw sharp lines in the sand (Table 6). Certain unethical practices are almost universally rejected: for example, accepting money from sources is deemed unacceptable under any circumstances by the vast majority (only 4.3% would justify it even occasionally), and only 8.7% would ever approve publishing information that is not yet verified. Similarly, practices like impersonating someone else to gather information or using personal data of private individuals without consent are largely disapproved of by journalists. By contrast, some aggressive reporting methods are considered acceptable by many reporters if used judiciously. A majority (62.8%) say that using hidden recording devices can be justified at least on occasion, and nearly half would justify using confidential documents without authorization (especially when those documents involve powerful institutions or figures). Paying for confidential information and accepting freebies from sources fall in a gray area but lean toward disapproval (only about one-quarter to one-third would condone these under some circumstances). Overall, the ethical stance of Paraguayan journalists is characterized by a strict devotion to professional standards and a cautious approach to ethically problematic newsgathering tactics.

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	679	89.4%	4.25	0.81
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	677	43.4%	3.07	1.15
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	680	30.7%	2.64	1.20
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	680	41.3%	2.91	1.25

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	679	2.5%	20.3%
Using hidden recording devices	677	5.9%	56.9%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	679	5.6%	37.0%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	679	6.3%	39.6%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	677	2.4%	18.8%
Paying people for confidential information	680	2.4%	30.9%
Accepting money from sources	679	1.2%	3.1%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	679	4.4%	24.4%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	676	3.4%	22.8%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	680	1.6%	7.1%

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

Paraguayan journalists generally report having a high degree of editorial autonomy in their own work (see Table 7). Approximately three-quarters of respondents said they have "a great deal" or "complete" freedom in selecting which news stories they work on (78.2%) and in deciding which aspects of a story to emphasize (74.4%). These figures suggest that, at the individual level within newsrooms, journalists feel they can exercise substantial professional judgment over content decisions.

However, their assessment of the broader media freedom in Paraguay is much less favorable. Only 18.4% of Paraguayan journalists believed that the country's media enjoy a great deal or complete freedom. The average perceived media freedom score was only 2.75 on a 5-point scale (where 5 indicates complete freedom), suggesting that most journalists see the press climate as one of "some" to "little" freedom nationally. In other words, despite feeling relatively free in their personal newsroom roles, Paraguayan journalists tend to view the overall media environment as constrained – likely due to political pressures, ownership concentration, legal limitations, or other external factors that affect press freedom in the country.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories you work on	680	78.2%	4.14	0.92
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story to emphasize	679	74.4%	4.03	0.95
Media freedom in Paraguay	673	18.4%	2.75	0.88

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

When asked about various potential influences on their work, Paraguayan journalists identified some key internal factors that shape news decisions, as well as a few significant external pressures (see Table 8). Professional norms and resources within the newsroom emerged as top influences. Notably, more than three-quarters (76.1%) of journalists said that “journalism ethics” – i.e. their professional codes and standards – have a very or extremely strong influence on how they produce news. This was the highest-rated influence overall, highlighting the importance of internalized ethics in guiding journalistic work. Other important internal influences included the availability of news-gathering resources (e.g. time, staff, equipment), which 55.2% rated as highly influential, and personal values and beliefs of the journalist (55.7% extremely/very influential). Traditional hierarchy and organizational factors also play a role: about half felt that editorial supervisors or higher editors (49.0%), the owners of the news organization (47.0%), and editorial policy (46.0%) were very influential on their work. Business pressures like advertising considerations (42.0%) and profit expectations (38.5%) were somewhat less frequently seen as strong influences, but still notable. Interestingly, feedback from the audience was deemed very influential by 42.9% of journalists, suggesting that audience reactions and engagement data do factor into editorial decisions for a significant segment of the press.

By comparison, external influences outside the newsroom were generally viewed as less potent, with a few exceptions. The factor that stood out most was access to information: nearly two-thirds (62.8%) of Paraguayan journalists said that the ease or difficulty of accessing information (e.g. getting official data, documents, or sources to talk) is an extremely or very influential determinant of their reporting. This highlights that transparency and availability of information in society significantly affect journalism. Other external forces – such as direct government censorship, political pressure from officials, or even media laws and regulations – were rated “very influential” by only a minority of journalists (for example, only 19.6% saw government censorship as highly influential, and 31.1% said the same of media laws). Likewise, interference or influence from actors like politicians, businesses, police, or interest groups did not score very high in general. One noteworthy external factor is the relationship with news sources: about 42.6% of journalists said that pressures stemming from sources (e.g. conditions set by sources, access provided or withheld, etc.) were very influential on their reporting. Meanwhile, competition in the media market was not seen as a major driver – only 18.9% rated competing news organizations as a very influential factor. And despite the security issues the country faces, only a small fraction regarded organized crime or criminal groups as a strong direct influence on their day-to-day editorial choices (around 15% perceived it as very influential). Overall, Paraguayan journalists seem to feel that their editorial judgment is shaped more by internal newsroom dynamics and professional principles (and the practical availability of information) than by overt external interferences, although the broader context of limited media freedom certainly looms in the background.

TABLE 8. PERCEIVED INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	632	34.0%	2.94	1.10
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	616	49.0%	3.25	1.24
The business managers of the news organization	636	39.0%	2.96	1.34
The owners of the news organization	634	47.0%	3.16	1.45
Editorial policy	630	46.0%	3.12	1.32
Advertising considerations	662	42.0%	3.01	1.30
Profit expectations	663	38.5%	2.96	1.22
Audience research and data	669	47.8%	3.24	1.19
Availability of news-gathering resources	674	55.2%	3.40	1.09
Time limits	675	40.0%	3.05	1.13
Journalism ethics	678	76.1%	3.94	0.99
Self-censorship	670	21.6%	2.54	1.16
Personal values and beliefs	675	55.7%	3.41	1.27
Colleagues in other media	674	12.8%	2.19	1.06
Friends, acquaintances and family	674	13.4%	2.20	1.09
Feedback from the audience	674	42.9%	3.21	1.05
Competing news organizations	671	18.9%	2.46	1.12
Media laws and regulation	671	31.1%	2.72	1.21
Access to information	674	62.8%	3.56	1.10
Government censorship	670	19.6%	2.30	1.21
Government officials	670	13.0%	2.09	1.11
Politicians	669	20.2%	2.30	1.22
Business people	669	26.6%	2.53	1.29
Public relations	673	26.6%	2.67	1.18
Relationships with news sources	676	42.6%	3.04	1.21
Police	676	16.3%	2.18	1.16
Issue advocacy groups	675	8.7%	1.95	1.02
Scientists or health experts	680	0.0%	1.35	0.48
Religious groups and institutions	675	13.2%	2.07	1.13
Military	675	6.1%	1.65	0.92
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	674	6.8%	1.58	0.93
Organized crime and criminal groups	671	15.2%	1.97	1.24
Terrorist groups	669	9.4%	1.67	1.09

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.)