

Portugal

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INTRODUCTION

Portugal entered 2025 with a moderately favorable economic outlook – projected GDP growth of 2% and a budget surplus – to continue the positive cycle that began in 2022. However, domestic political volatility persists, highlighted by the government's collapse in March 2025 after a failed parliamentary confidence vote, leading to Portugal's third general election in three years.

Despite ranking higher in RSF's 2024 World Press Freedom Index and benefiting from strong constitutional protections and high public trust, journalists in Portugal face significant pressures. Ongoing economic instability is a major concern, reflected in poor financial security scores and studies revealing widespread issues such as low pay and stagnant salaries, job insecurity, chronic fatigue, and occupational stress.

The 2023 fieldwork was conducted amid strong economic momentum: GDP grew 2.5% (following 2022's 7.0% surge), achieving a historic budget surplus (1.2%) and reducing public debt below 100% while boosting household income. Concurrently, two crises unfolded: PM António Costa resigned after being named a suspect in a corruption probe involving lithium/hydrogen projects, deeming the allegations "incompatible" with his office; Global Media Group (*DN/JN/TSF/Açoriano Oriental*) faced a severe crisis after its September sale to a Bahamas-based, Paradise Papers-linked fund. By December, management imposed 150+ layoffs (halving JN's newsroom), canceled 200 contracts, and withheld wages – triggering strikes that halted JN's print run for the first time in 35 years.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Although journalism in Portugal was still predominantly male in 2023, with women holding 41% of professional cards, our sample featured a higher proportion of women (57.7%), which corresponds better to the gender distribution in Portugal's younger cohorts. Portuguese journalists exhibit significant educational qualifications: 59.6% have a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, 36.3% a Master's or equivalent, and 1.1% a Doctorate. Additionally, formal journalism education or training is nearly universal (99.2%), typically acquired at university (77.7%) or through apprenticeships/cadetships (58.7%), with short-term courses being less prevalent (7.4%). The average age of Portuguese journalists is 38.1 years (Median = 37; SD = 9.6).

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

Distribution across media types in Portugal showed newspapers employing 23.2% of journalists, television 21.3%, magazines 18.6%, and native online media 17.2%. Radio represented 9.3% and news agencies 2.7%, with 7.7% lacking a primary employer. In terms of reach, 76.5% targeted (trans)national audiences, while 15.8% catered primarily to local or regional audiences.

The average journalist had 15.5 years of professional experience (Median = 14; SD = 9.3), with 79.5% working across multiple beats. A slight majority (53.3%) were unaffiliated with the trade union.

Employment status revealed 66.1% permanently and 23.8% temporarily employed full-time, contrasting with 10.1% freelance/self-employed roles. Few (1.6%) supplemented income with non-journalism work.

With a mean workweek of 43.2 hours (Median = 42; SD = 5.1; for those in full-time employment), 69.4% frequently experienced work-related stress in the past six months, while 30.6% did so rarely or never.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Portuguese journalists identified verbal abuse – including demeaning or hateful speech and public discrediting campaigns – as their most prevalent safety threat (Table 1). While rarer, severe risks like hacking, legal harassment, and coercion also raised concerns. Reflecting these realities, most journalists reported concerns for their physical/emotional safety, but less than half worried about unemployment (Table 2). Critically, almost all feared impunity for those targeting journalists.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	366	0.0%	0.5%	17.2%	35.5%	46.7%
Public discrediting of your work	366	0.0%	2.2%	13.4%	36.6%	47.8%
Surveillance	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	3.6%	95.6%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	366	0.0%	0.5%	0.5%	7.1%	91.8%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	99.5%
Legal actions against you because of your work	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	1.1%	98.6%
Stalking	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	1.4%	98.1%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	366	0.5%	0.0%	1.9%	28.1%	69.4%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	97.0%
Other physical attacks	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%	97.5%
Coercion	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	5.9%	93.4%
Questioning of your personal morality	366	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	4.3%	94.9%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100 %
Others disseminating your personal information	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	98.8%
Workplace bullying	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.8%	98.4%
Abductions	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100 %
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100 %
Intimidation that targets family	366	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	99.2%

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	366	43.4%	3.01	1.21
Concerned about physical well-being	366	1.9%	1.33	0.67
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	366	67.8%	3.70	0.57
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Portugal go unpunished	366	97.8%	4.13	0.47

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

Portuguese journalists strongly endorsed classic watchdog and informer roles, while interventionist and audience-focused approaches were less valued though still relevant (Table 3). Loyal-facilitator and educator roles were least favored, despite being rated highly important by roughly a quarter or fewer.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	366	100.0%	4.88	0.32
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	366	98.6%	4.71	0.50
Shine a light on society's problems	366	90.7%	4.11	0.56
Motivate people to participate in politics	366	35.5%	3.29	0.64
Provide analysis of current affairs	366	97.3%	4.30	0.51
Let people express their views	366	87.2%	4.01	0.52
Provide information people need to form political opinion	366	50.5%	3.61	0.71
Advocate for social change	366	39.6%	3.40	0.57
Influence public opinion	366	66.4%	3.63	0.67
Set the political agenda	366	43.3%	3.30	0.74
Promote peace and tolerance	366	32.8%	3.22	0.71
Educate the audience	366	22.4%	3.13	0.63
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	366	22.4%	3.07	0.65
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	366	12.0%	2.94	0.60
Support national development	366	13.7%	2.79	0.72
Support government policy	366	18.9%	2.98	0.69
Convey a positive image of political leaders	366	12.3%	2.73	0.82
Provide entertainment and relaxation	366	33.9%	3.19	0.81
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	366	41.8%	3.39	0.62
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	366	35.8%	3.27	0.63
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	366	38.5%	3.25	0.74
Support efforts to protect public health	366	53.8%	3.56	0.66
Counteract disinformation	366	90.2%	4.11	0.56
Discuss future implications of current events	366	79.0%	3.87	0.53

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

While perceptions of journalistic epistemology varied significantly (Table 4), Portuguese respondents converged on valuing interpretive analysis, objective reporting, and alerting audiences to false claims. Conversely, sharp divisions emerged regarding the absolutist view that "truth is binary" and journalists' ability to intuitively predict a story's final form.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	364	97.8%	4.63	0.62
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	366	45.4%	2.69	1.30
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	366	22.4%	2.53	0.88
Things are either true or false. there is no in-between	366	2.2%	2.35	0.57
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	366	89.1%	3.90	0.42
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	261	31.0%	2.91	0.86
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	258	19.0%	2.69	0.79
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	258	47.7%	3.31	0.90
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	258	21.3%	2.55	0.87
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	258	68.2%	3.37	1.06
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	258	84.5%	3.93	1.13

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

Portuguese journalists placed a strong emphasis on professional standards rather than subjective or situational ethics in their reporting (see Table 5). While they most firmly rejected controversial practices, such as accepting payments from sources, publishing disguised promotional content (known as "native advertising"), and spreading unverified information (as noted in Table 6), they generally found it acceptable to use unauthorized confidential documents, including those belonging to influential individuals, as well as hidden recording devices.

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	366	92.3%	4.09	0.74
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	366	93.4%	4.60	0.79
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	366	15.6%	2.16	1.05
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	366	0.3%	1.54	0.57

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	366	0.0%	65.6%
Using hidden recording devices	366	0.0%	83.3%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	366	0.5%	91.3%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	366	0.0%	92.6%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	366	0.0%	35.5%
Paying people for confidential information	366	0.5%	65.3%
Accepting money from sources	366	0.3%	4.9%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	366	0.3%	41.8%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	366	0.0%	1.6%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	366	0.5%	1.9%

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 Portugal indicated substantial editorial freedom – both in story selection and emphasis – in their daily work (Table 7), yet paradoxically assessed broader systemic media freedom as comparatively limited.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	366	94.8%	4.13	0.48
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	366	99.5%	4.59	0.50
Media freedom in Portugal	366	38.6%	3.33	0.61

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Portuguese journalists identified professional ethics, time constraints, and editorial policy as the most influential internal factors in news production (Table 8). Among external factors, access to information and source relationships were rated extremely or very impactful.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	363	3.0%	2.22	0.60
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	336	52.7%	3.48	0.64
The business managers of the news organization	361	5.8%	2.23	0.76
The owners of the news organization	362	6.4%	1.53	0.93
Editorial policy	366	87.2%	4.02	0.71
Advertising considerations	356	12.1%	2.52	0.82
Profit expectations	358	11.7%	2.44	0.83
Audience research and data	364	32.7%	3.03	0.83
Availability of news-gathering resources	366	65.0%	3.77	0.68
Time limits	366	91.8%	4.10	0.53
Journalism ethics	366	97.3%	4.29	0.61
Self-censorship	364	6.6%	1.61	0.87
Personal values and beliefs	365	1.6%	1.35	0.69
Colleagues in other media	364	0.8%	2.13	0.64
Friends, acquaintances and family	364	0.5%	1.22	0.53
Feedback from the audience	365	4.7%	2.43	0.69
Competing news organizations	365	23.3%	3.01	0.74
Media laws and regulation	364	13.2%	1.70	1.11
Access to information	365	84.1%	3.86	0.96
Government censorship	360	3.1%	1.17	0.59
Government officials	358	2.2%	1.45	0.74
Politicians	362	23.8%	2.61	1.03
Business people	365	13.7%	2.58	0.83
Public relations	365	24.9%	2.89	0.94
Relationships with news sources	365	81.9%	3.98	1.02
Police	361	1.1%	1.39	0.64
Issue advocacy groups	362	0.3%	1.53	0.69
Scientists or health experts	123	2.5%	1.60	0.71
Religious groups and institutions	115	1.6%	1.29	0.51
Military	36	0.9%	1.22	0.42
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	35	0.0%	1.23	0.49
Organized crime and criminal groups	38	0.0%	1.47	1.18
Terrorist groups	356	10.5%	2.19	0.70

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.)