

Romania

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INTRODUCTION

Romania is governed by a coalition struggling to preserve stability, Western direction, and reforms, but the political situation is witnessing mounting populist pressure and institutional mistrust. The war in Ukraine led Romanian powers to implement Western sanctions and revise national defence policy, while accelerating inflation due to rising energy prices placed additional economic pressure on household budgets. Cities improved in terms of information technology and service provision, but the rural areas remained behind in terms of employment opportunities and infrastructural development.

Media in Romania underwent a radical transformation after the fall of communism, and one of the noticeable trends was the proliferation of independent media throughout the 1990s. This initial promise was later compromised by arrangements characterized by restricted ownership, decreased capacity for self-regulation, and dependence on political or commercial sponsorship. The mass media often displayed preference for established business elites or political power centres, while public service broadcasters were charged with editorial interference. Regardless of these obstacles, there is still a tradition of investigative journalism, fed by a community of professional media and civil society actors, trying to uncover corruption and induce accountability of those in power.

During 2022-2023, the Romanian media landscape was struck by a few high-impact disruptive events. Most notorious cases of high plagiarism have caused public criticism, which has been further fuelled by the imminent prospect of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP) against investigative reporters. Despite continued attempts to produce credible reporting on corruption and social injustices, the Romanian media are economically weak, vulnerable to editorial pressure, and exercise self-censorship.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Of the 367 journalists surveyed, 65.4% were women and 34.6% men. The average age was 36.9 years (SD = 12.1), with a median age of 35. In terms of education, 41.1% held a bachelor's degree, 40.6% a master's, 3.5% a doctorate, and 9.0% had completed only high school. A majority (69.8%) reported having formal education or professional training in journalism. Among those with training, 75.4% studied at a university or college. In other forms of training, 93.8% completed a journalism apprenticeship or cadetship, and 31.6% attended a short-term course. These figures reflect a relatively young, highly educated, and professionally trained journalistic workforce.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

Most Romanian journalists, 66.5%, do not occupy any management positions; in comparison, 25.3% engage in middle-management and 8.2% in top-management roles. Regarding audience reach, an overwhelming majority of 73.6% cover national channels, while minority percentages cover local (6.8%), regional (6.8%), or transnational audiences (7.6%); another 5.2% do not specify a primary platform. About primary ownership, 52.9% work for private/commercial media, 32.4% for public service media, 4.4% for state-run, 0.5% for community, and 7.6% for non-profit organizations.

The Romanian journalists have an average of 14.4 years of experience (SD = 9.8; Median = 12). More than half of the journalists (52.3%) indicate that they work on a particular beat or topic, and the remaining journalists cover a broader range of journalistic subjects. The rate of union membership is measured at 24.5%, indicating that the vast majority (75.5%) are not members of any professional labour union.

In terms of employment, the landscape is dominated by relatively high percentages of full-time permanent contracts (76.6%), with lower percentages working part-time permanent (3.0%), full-time fixed-term (8.5%), or part-time fixed-term contracts (0.8%). Self-employment or freelancing is 8.2%, with 2.5% on other arrangements. Furthermore, income data indicate that only 52.9% derive all their work-related income from journalism, meaning the other 47.1% will need to supplement their incomes elsewhere.

The average weekly workload is 44.4 hours (SD = 8.5; Median = 40) for journalists in full-time employment. Stress levels are significant: 20.5% report being stressed "often," and 24.9% "very often," while just 8.3% never feel work-related stress. About their background of the workplace, most participants organizations have a background in television (30.6%), internet-native platforms (28.4%), radio (18.6%), and news agencies (13.7%), while relatively smaller percentages work in outlets publishing newspapers (3.6%) and magazine companies (1.6%).

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Journalists face a range of threats, with the most prominent being demeaning or hateful speech, surveillance, and public discrediting. These pressures are particularly pronounced among journalists who lack managerial responsibilities and those working in private media organizations, as opposed to individuals in leadership positions or those employed by public service media. While other forms of threats – hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites, legal actions, stalking, coercion, other threats or intimidations – are reported less frequently, nonetheless, they represent significant concerns (see Table 1). This environment contributes to professional anxiety among journalists: over 40% report concerns regarding their physical safety, while nearly half express apprehension about their emotional well-being. More than half believe that aggressors usually go unpunished (see Table 2).

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	367	3.0%	7.6%	18.8%	24.0%	46.6%
Public discrediting of your work	367	2.2%	6.8%	16.6%	20.2%	54.2%
Surveillance	367	4.1%	6.3%	15.5%	18.3%	55.9%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	367	1.6%	2.5%	8.4%	13.9%	73.6%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	367	0.3%	0.3%	0.5%	1.9%	97.0%
Legal actions against you because of your work	367	1.4%	2.2%	3.3%	6.5%	86.6%
Stalking	367	1.4%	3.0%	5.4%	11.7%	78.5%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	367	1.6%	4.6%	7.1%	17.4%	69.2%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	367	0.5%	0.3%	1.4%	5.2%	92.6%
Other physical attacks	367	0.3%	0.5%	1.6%	4.4%	93.2%
Coercion	367	0.5%	1.6%	9.0%	21.5%	67.3%
Questioning of your personal morality	367	1.1%	4.6%	7.9%	19.6%	66.8%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	367	0.5%	0.8%	6.3%	8.2%	84.2%
Others disseminating your personal information	367	0.0%	1.6%	4.6%	11.2%	82.6%
Workplace bullying	367	0.8%	1.1%	6.0%	10.4%	81.7%
Abductions	367	0.5%	0.0%	0.3%	1.1%	98.1%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	367	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	1.9%	97.5%
Intimidation that targets family	367	0.3%	0.5%	2.7%	4.9%	91.6%

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	367	9.8%	2.00	1.10
Concerned about physical well-being	367	42.2%	2.91	1.39
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	367	47.1%	3.06	1.48
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Romania go unpunished	367	61.3%	3.71	1.35

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 Romanian journalists have undergone a major redefinition of their professional identity. Traditional journalistic roles have taken a backseat as media professionals embrace more socially and community-driven roles. The focus is now on new key proactive functions, like counteracting disinformation (85.5% of the journalists) and shining a light on society's problems (81.5% of the journalists), but also on other roles that involve engagement, such as educating the public, promoting peace and tolerance or supporting efforts to protect public health (see Table 3). On the other hand, journalists also assume some traditional, objective and rather neutral roles, such as allowing people to express their problems, and providing analyses.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	367	72.2%	4.06	1.00
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	367	55.6%	3.66	1.13
Shine a light on society's problems	367	81.5%	4.36	0.89
Motivate people to participate in politics	367	37.6%	3.15	1.24
Provide analysis of current affairs	367	72.5%	4.08	0.95
Let people express their views	367	73.6%	4.08	0.96
Provide information people need to form political opinion	367	70.3%	3.99	1.11
Advocate for social change	367	51.5%	3.58	1.17
Influence public opinion	367	22.6%	2.74	1.14
Set the political agenda	367	15.3%	2.40	1.12
Promote peace and tolerance	367	73.3%	4.16	1.06
Educate the audience	367	77.7%	4.29	1.01
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	367	60.2%	3.81	1.07
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	367	58.6%	3.74	1.10
Support national development	367	64.3%	3.92	1.08
Support government policy	367	14.2%	2.43	1.03
Convey a positive image of political leaders	367	3.3%	1.54	0.81
Provide entertainment and relaxation	367	22.9%	2.74	1.13
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	367	40.1%	3.29	1.21
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	367	31.9%	3.03	1.22
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	367	22.3%	2.71	1.11
Support efforts to protect public health	367	66.8%	3.99	1.08
Counteract disinformation	367	85.0%	4.49	0.94
Discuss future implications of current events	367	70.6%	3.99	1.05

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 was considerable agreement among Romanian journalists regarding epistemological values (see Table 4). Respondents strongly supported alerting audiences when claims are untruthful and agreed that objective reality can be represented in reporting, alongside letting facts speak for themselves. Interpretation was moderately valued.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	367	48.2%	3.20	1.27
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	367	39.0%	2.97	1.30
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	367	28.3%	2.71	1.20
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	367	40.6%	3.13	1.33
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	367	77.9%	4.13	1.04
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	366	40.2%	2.87	1.33
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	366	57.4%	3.46	1.20
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	366	69.1%	3.91	1.07
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	366	24.9%	2.56	1.24
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	366	62.3%	3.75	1.31
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	366	86.1%	4.42	1.00

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

Most of the Romanian journalists strongly agree that ethical orientation should always be determined by professional standards, regardless of situation and personal judgment (see Table 5). The same applies to controversial reporting methods such as paying for confidential information, accepting money and products from sources or broadcasting stories not yet verified. However, almost 50% of the Romanian journalists consider using hidden recording devices and over 75% claiming to be someone else justified (see Table 6).

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	367	78.7%	4.20	1.03
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	367	47.7%	3.13	1.34
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	367	28.3%	2.45	1.36
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	367	14.7%	1.97	1.26

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	367	1.6%	47.1%
Using hidden recording devices	367	4.6%	71.4%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	367	3.5%	41.7%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	367	3.5%	31.9%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	367	1.1%	15.3%
Paying people for confidential information	367	2.2%	33.5%
Accepting money from sources	367	0.8%	6.3%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	367	1.1%	16.1%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	367	1.6%	12.5%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	367	0.5%	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

Romanian journalists reported a great degree of freedom in deciding what to cover and how to emphasize the aspects of a story (see Table 7). Overall attitudes towards the general state of media freedom in Romania were considerably more negative, uncovering deeper concerns about media in Romania, even though there was a strong perception of individual editorial independence in their own work as journalists.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	364	73.1%	4.03	0.89
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	361	70.9%	3.94	0.89
Media freedom in Romania	366	25.7%	3.05	0.79

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

When reflecting on the internal factors shaping their work, media professionals in Romania highlighted journalistic ethics, editorial policy, and the availability of news-gathering resources as the most influential (see Table 8). As for external factors, respondents pointed to access to information, media legislation, and regulatory frameworks as having the strongest impact on news production.

In the absence of accessible and affordable media liability insurance, journalists remain exposed to SLAPP and other forms of intimidation, a vulnerability especially pronounced among freelancers, who often operate without the institutional protection available to staff reporters.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	327	13.5%	2.39	1.03
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	331	37.2%	3.13	1.20
The business managers of the news organization	318	33.0%	2.84	1.35
The owners of the news organization	297	29.6%	2.66	1.43
Editorial policy	340	44.1%	3.25	1.25
Advertising considerations	299	14.4%	2.08	1.23
Profit expectations	295	23.1%	2.31	1.43
Audience research and data	329	33.4%	2.99	1.27
Availability of news-gathering resources	343	46.1%	3.39	1.19
Time limits	338	37.3%	3.16	1.21
Journalism ethics	349	67.0%	3.89	1.15
Self-censorship	321	14.3%	2.23	1.18
Personal values and beliefs	342	38.6%	3.10	1.38
Colleagues in other media	337	10.1%	2.15	1.06
Friends, acquaintances and family	337	3.3%	1.76	0.85
Feedback from the audience	346	36.1%	3.20	1.11
Competing news organizations	331	16.0%	2.37	1.18
Media laws and regulation	344	47.4%	3.40	1.23
Access to information	348	56.6%	3.63	1.11
Government censorship	306	10.8%	1.87	1.17
Government officials	306	7.5%	1.67	1.07
Politicians	307	8.8%	1.68	1.12
Businesspeople	305	5.6%	1.54	0.94
Public relations	331	22.1%	2.55	1.27
Relationships with news sources	333	33.3%	2.98	1.22
Police	302	10.6%	1.88	1.11
Issue advocacy groups	306	11.4%	1.96	1.12
Scientists or health experts	320	25.0%	2.62	1.29
Religious groups and institutions	304	11.5%	1.87	1.17
Military	297	7.1%	1.74	1.02
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	294	5.1%	1.45	0.91
Organized crime and criminal groups	292	4.8%	1.40	0.87
Terrorist groups	289	3.5%	1.32	0.76

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.)