

Slovenia

IGOR VOBIČ & BORIS MANCE

INTRODUCTION

With a population of approximately two million, Slovenia – a former republic of socialist Yugoslavia and a member of the European Union since 2004 – hosts more than 2,000 media outlets, among them around 140 news media outlets. While this abundance suggests a pluralistic media landscape, the reality is more complex.

Slovenian journalism has undergone continuous transformation since the end of socialist self-management and the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991, a period marked by the country's transition to capitalism and Western-style representative democracy. Prevailing libertarian principles of media freedom, along with the notion that journalists serve as representatives of the public, have been articulated in ways that reflect not only the influence of Western models – their traditions, ideas, and institutions – but also elements of Slovenia's own historical experience. These processes have resulted in a landscape characterized by the concentration of media ownership and recurrent political attempts to influence journalism. Consequently, debates surrounding media pluralism and professional autonomy remain prominent and frequent topics of public debate.

The country retains a legacy of a strong welfare state, originating from its former socialist system and, to an extent, still upheld today. Although the system has experienced a degree of erosion over time, it continues to provide citizens with comprehensive social and health security, accessible public services, and a range of social safety nets. These mechanisms serve to mitigate the adverse effects of precarious employment, including within journalism.

At the time of data collection, a prolonged strike was underway at the public broadcaster RTV Slovenia, driven by concerns over political interference and threats to professional autonomy. This coincided with efforts by the newly elected government – following the 2022 parliamentary elections – to dismantle entrenched legal mechanisms of political control. These reforms sought to establish conditions of institutional autonomy and restore public confidence in public media.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Among Slovenian journalists surveyed, 57.2% identified as female, 40.7% as male, and 0.3% as other. The average age was 44.0 years (SD = 10.4), with a Median of 45 years. In terms of education, two thirds had a Bologna master's degree or equivalent, 17.9% held a Bologna bachelor's degree or equivalent, and 2.1% a doctorate. Around 60.6% had formal education or professional training in journalism. Of those trained, 80.9% attended a university or college, 89.9% had undergone an apprenticeship, and 21.1% completed a short-term course.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In terms of the background of their main employers, nearly a quarter of surveyed journalists worked for companies publishing newspapers (24.9%) or television (24.6%), while 23.7% were employed in radio outlets, reflecting the continued dominance of traditional media. Digital-native outlets accounted for a smaller but notable share (15.1%), followed by news agencies (8.0%). Employment in magazines (3.0%), telecommunications (0.3%), and other sectors (0.6%) was far less common. The data also included one non-response (0.3%), suggesting nearly complete survey participation.

The Slovenian journalistic workforce demonstrates a relatively balanced employment structure. The vast majority of surveyed journalists (84.4%) held full-time permanent contracts, indicating relatively stable employment conditions. A small proportion worked under part-time permanent (1.5%) or full-time fixed-term arrangements (2.4%). Freelance or self-employment accounted for 8.3% of respondents, while 3.5% reported other employment types. These results suggest a workforce predominantly characterized by secure, long-term positions, with limited precarious employment.

Most journalists in the sample (84.4%) are employed full-time in news organizations, with a mean of 20.4 years of work experience (SD = 9.9, Median = 20) and an average of 44.3 hours worked per week (SD = 8.5, Median = 40; for those in full-time employment). About a fifth of journalists (21.8%) maintain secondary employment outside their primary media work. This supplementary work is distributed across: education (5.6%), PR/corporate communications (3.2%), advertising (2.9%), government agencies (1.8%), and other sectors (5.3%). The workforce demonstrates strong professional organization, with nearly two-thirds (64.3%) holding union membership.

While journalists are frequently assigned to specific coverage areas, only 26.2% specialize in particular beats or subject matters. Work-related stress appears prevalent, affecting more than a quarter of respondents (27.7%), indicating potential challenges in workplace conditions despite the overall stability of employment in the sector.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Journalists in Slovenia have encountered a range of safety threats. Most frequently reported are demeaning or hateful speech (60.4% at least sometimes), public discrediting (52.6%), and surveillance (38.4%) (see Table 1). More severe incidents such as arrests, stalking, or physical attacks were rarely reported. Concerns about safety are prominent: 29.6% are worried about job loss, 58.2% about physical well-being, 64.4% about mental health, and 81.8% about impunity for those who harm journalists (see Table 2).

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	338	19.8%	17.2%	23.4%	28.4%	11.2%
Public discrediting of your work	336	19.0%	11.0%	22.6%	23.8%	23.5%
Surveillance	329	5.8%	11.9%	20.7%	27.7%	34.0%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	336	0.6%	1.5%	6.0%	10.4%	81.5%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	337	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	99.4%
Legal actions against you because of your work	337	1.8%	1.5%	4.2%	10.4%	82.2%
Stalking	338	0.0%	2.4%	1.8%	7.1%	88.8%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	336	2.7%	6.0%	11.0%	28.6%	51.8%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	336	0.0%	1.2%	0.9%	5.1%	92.9%
Other physical attacks	334	0.0%	0.9%	1.2%	3.0%	94.9%
Coercion	335	0.6%	1.2%	3.0%	13.7%	81.5%
Questioning of your personal morality	336	6.0%	7.7%	17.6%	31.5%	37.2%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	338	0.6%	0.3%	0.9%	5.9%	92.3%
Others disseminating your personal information	338	1.5%	2.7%	6.8%	17.8%	71.3%
Workplace bullying	337	5.0%	3.0%	6.5%	15.4%	70.0%
Abductions	336	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	99.7%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	338	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.3%	99.1%
Intimidation that targets family	337	0.6%	0.3%	1.2%	6.5%	91.4%

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	29.6%	2.58	1.36
Concerned about physical well-being	337	58.2%	3.39	1.35
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	337	64.4%	3.55	1.31
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Slovenia go unpunished	335	81.8%	4.26	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

Journalists in Slovenia assign high importance to several roles. The most valued are shining light on social problems (Mean = 4.6) (see Table 3), counteracting disinformation (Mean = 4.6), providing political information (Mean = 4.4), and being a detached observer (Mean = 4.4). Less importance is placed on advocacy roles or audience maximization strategies.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	332	53.3%	4.37	0.77
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	338	52.1%	4.26	0.94
Shine a light on society's problems	335	70.4%	4.64	0.62
Motivate people to participate in politics	336	10.7%	2.36	1.08
Provide analysis of current affairs	337	48.7%	4.32	0.75
Let people express their views	335	28.1%	3.81	0.94
Provide information people need to form political opinion	339	58.1%	4.38	0.88
Advocate for social change	339	26.0%	3.55	1.15
Influence public opinion	336	8.9%	2.97	1.08
Set the political agenda	334	12.6%	3.08	1.13
Promote peace and tolerance	336	54.5%	4.28	0.91
Educate the audience	337	55.5%	4.32	0.88
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	335	40.6%	4.03	0.97
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	338	41.7%	4.05	1.01
Support national development	337	18.4%	3.35	1.10
Provide entertainment and relaxation	339	4.1%	2.08	0.99
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	338	12.1%	3.08	1.09
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	339	8.6%	2.65	1.15
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	339	8.3%	2.46	1.03
Support efforts to protect public health	338	27.2%	3.78	1.00
Counteract disinformation	338	73.7%	4.64	0.65
Discuss future implications of current events	339	40.4%	4.16	0.84

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

A substantial portion of Slovenian journalists believe in the importance of objective reporting and letting the facts speak (see Table 4). Approximately 93.1% agree that journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful. However, only 6.3% agree that truth is inevitably shaped by those in power, indicating low relativistic leanings.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	336	40.8%	3.16	1.05
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	335	6.3%	1.86	0.90
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	336	15.5%	2.50	1.00
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	336	38.1%	3.06	1.11
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	337	41.2%	3.12	1.06
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	334	27.2%	2.88	0.99
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	335	6.3%	2.27	0.83
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	335	48.7%	3.36	0.88
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	334	24.3%	2.74	1.00
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	335	7.2%	2.08	0.93
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	334	93.1%	4.435	0.65

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

Ethical standards are highly valued among Slovenian journalists as 89.0% believe that ethical behavior should always be guided by professional standards (see Table 5). Justification for controversial methods is low: for instance, only 0.9% approve of pretending to be someone else, and 0.3% support publishing unverified information (see Table 7). The majority reject such practices.

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	337	89.0%	4.44	0.75
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	331	48.3%	3.16	1.29
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	331	12.7%	2.03	1.11
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	330	3.9%	1.57	0.86

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	338	0.9%	60.1%
Using hidden recording devices	338	0.3%	79.6%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	337	5.3%	77.7%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	336	3.0%	67.3%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	338	0.3%	20.4%
Paying people for confidential information	338	0.0%	25.1%
Accepting money from sources	338	0.0%	1.2%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	337	0.0%	4.7%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	338	0.3%	12.4%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	338	0.3%	34.6%

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

There is moderate to strong editorial freedom in Slovenia (see Table 7). Around 61.5% report having considerable freedom to select stories, and about two thirds in deciding what to emphasize. Media freedom is perceived as somewhat lower (59.5%), suggesting external influences may still be present.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	338	61.5%	3.70	0.90
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	336	67.3%	3.87	0.85
Media freedom in Slovenia	333	59.5%	3.31	1.02

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Internal editorial factors, such as supervision and policy, are more influential than external ones (see Table 8). Editorial supervisors (75.8%) and ethics (73.9%) are seen as highly influential. External actors like politicians, business people, and organized crime are not considered as very/extremely influential. This points to perceptions of a relatively autonomous media environment.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	331	47.4%	3.51	1.02
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	327	75.8%	4.13	0.90
The business managers of the news organization	299	48.8%	3.45	1.42
The owners of the news organization	285	41.1%	3.07	1.48
Editorial policy	333	69.7%	3.94	1.00
Advertising considerations	301	20.6%	2.44	1.23
Profit expectations	305	38.0%	3.06	1.36
Audience research and data	318	33.6%	3.03	1.26
Availability of news-gathering resources	318	50.3%	3.50	1.02
Time limits	328	63.7%	3.80	1.04
Journalism ethics	330	73.9%	4.00	1.01
Self-censorship	318	15.4%	2.46	1.06
Personal values and beliefs	324	44.8%	3.38	1.14
Colleagues in other media	332	8.7%	2.38	0.93
Friends, acquaintances and family	332	6.3%	2.09	0.92
Feedback from the audience	333	21.3%	2.88	0.91
Competing news organizations	332	16.0%	2.52	1.02
Media laws and regulation	324	38.9%	3.23	1.05
Access to information	332	63.6%	3.77	0.91
Government censorship	310	8.1%	1.72	1.00
Government officials	317	3.8%	1.63	0.86
Politicians	324	6.8%	1.77	0.96
Business people	323	5.0%	1.69	0.91
Public relations	328	9.8%	2.18	0.96
Relationships with news sources	328	32.9%	3.06	1.02
Police	317	1.6%	1.51	0.76
Issue advocacy groups	324	7.4%	2.08	0.98
Scientists or health experts	322	24.8%	2.70	1.15
Religious groups and institutions	327	2.1%	1.38	0.72
Military	324	0.3%	1.28	0.60
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	316	0.0%	1.10	0.35
Organized crime and criminal groups	319	0.3%	1.12	0.40
Terrorist groups	319	0.0%	1.04	0.23

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.)