

# Spain

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## INTRODUCTION

Spain became a democracy in the late 1970s and joined the European Union in 1986. From the early 1980s to the mid-2010s, its political system was marked by bipartisanship, which has weakened over the past decade. In 2019, a coalition government was formed for the first time. However, political and social polarization has continued to intensify throughout the 21st century. Economically, Spain has a lower GDP per capita than other Western European countries and consistently high structural unemployment, rarely falling below 10% in the last 30 years.

Spain has a polarised pluralist media system according to Hallin & Mancini (2004). In line with this, the country features a politically oriented press with small circulations – a trend that has intensified with the rise of digital journalism – commentary-driven content, high levels of parallelism, media instrumentalisation, and external pluralism. Additionally, precarious working conditions and low salaries have become defining traits of journalism in Spain.

The fieldwork for this study was conducted between March and July 2023, a period during which two elections took place. The first, the regional and local elections held on May 28th, limited journalists' availability for interviews during the campaign period. Following his party's poor results, the prime minister called a general election for July 23rd. This second election was less disruptive to the research, as fewer local and regional journalists were involved in the national campaign.

## BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The sample of Spanish journalists is slightly male-dominated, as 55.8% of the people interviewed were men. On average, they were 42.1 years old (SD = 11.9; Median = 43). Most Spanish journalists have obtained a grant at the university: 95.7%. Of them, 61.9% held a bachelor's degree or equivalent, 30.2% had a master's degree or equivalent, and 3.6% obtained a doctorate. More than 90% of the interviewed journalists had received professional training in the field (91.6%), with most of them acquiring this knowledge at university (96.1%). Only 1.4% received this qualification via apprenticeships or cadetships, and another 2.5% via short-term courses.

## JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

Spanish journalists are quite experienced, with an average of 17.4 years in the profession (SD = 11.6; Median = 17). In terms of the background of their main employers, about a third of those who participated in the survey work for newspapers (33.5%), followed by Internet-native outlets (28.4%) and TV broadcasters (22.4%). Fewer are employed by radio stations (9.0%), magazine companies (3.8%), or news agencies (2.8%).

Most of the journalists serve local or regional media (73.1%), while 28.9% work for national or transnational companies. Regarding ownership, 81.3% are employed by private or commercial media, 15.1% by public service media, and 3.6% by state-owned companies. Over half (54.0%) hold no management role, 27.9% are in middle management, and 18.1% in top management. Only 30.4% cover a specific thematic area.

In terms of working conditions, 75.4% have full-time permanent contracts, 10.7% are freelancers or self-employed, and 5.4% have full-time fixed-term contracts. Just 7.9% work part-time: 5.9% with fixed-term and 2.0% with permanent contracts. Most dedicate all their working time to journalism, with only 15.9% reporting additional income from outside the profession. On average, they work 44.4 hours per week (SD = 8.4; Median = 40; for those in full-time employment), exceeding the legal maximum of 40 hours. Despite this, only 34.5% are union members.

In Spain, journalists report considerable workplace stress: 26.9% feel stressed often and 32.2% very often. In contrast, 4.3% never feel stressed, 11.3% rarely, and 25.3% sometimes.

## SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Spanish journalists generally do not experience the threats listed in the survey (see Table 1). None of the items is reported as occurring often or very often by more than 10% of respondents. Moreover, incidents such as arrests, sexual assault, or other physical attacks are virtually nonexistent among professionals. Nevertheless, over half of Spanish journalists are concerned that those who harm journalists in Spain go unpunished (53.2% agree or strongly agree with this statement). Additionally, they express greater concern for their mental well-being (35.8%) than for their physical safety (4.3%) (see Table 2).

**TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS**

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	391	3.6%	4.1%	16.6%	25.1%	50.6%
Public discrediting of your work	391	2.6%	4.6%	17.8%	27.4%	47.6%
Surveillance	388	2.3%	5.2%	11.1%	15.4%	66%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	391	1%	1%	4.2%	7.4%	86.4%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	391	0%	0%	0%	0.8%	99.2%
Legal actions against you because of your work	391	1.8%	1.3%	5.6%	10.2%	81.1%
Stalking	388	0.5%	2.6%	5.9%	12.1%	78.9%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	390	1.8%	3.1%	11%	21%	63.1%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	391	0.3%	0%	1%	3.6%	96.1%
Other physical attacks	391	0.3%	0.3%	0.8%	2.3%	96.3%
Coercion	391	1.5%	3.1%	12.5%	21.5%	61.4%
Workplace bullying	391	1%	1.3%	8.7%	12.8%	76.2%

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	391	20.8%	2.21	1.40
Concerned about physical well-being	391	4.3%	1.34	0.87
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	391	35.8%	2.99	1.30
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Spain go unpunished	391	53.2%	3.85	1.14

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 tend to avoid viewing themselves as political actors and largely disagree with the notion that their role includes supporting government policies, offering a positive image of politicians, or setting the political agenda. Conversely, they see themselves as observers whose responsibility is to inform and interpret reality for the audience and to scrutinize those in power (see Table 3).

**TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES**

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	391	92.6%	4.59	0.70
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	391	83.4%	4.33	0.89
Shine a light on society's problems	391	98.5%	4.85	0.44
Motivate people to participate in politics	391	22.5%	2.66	1.13
Provide analysis of current affairs	391	87.5%	4.38	0.74
Let people express their views	391	85.4%	4.39	0.79
Provide information people need to form political opinion	390	81%	4.29	1.00
Advocate for social change	391	61.4%	3.77	1.11
Influence public opinion	391	39.9%	3.15	1.16
Set the political agenda	391	24%	2.60	1.18
Promote peace and tolerance	391	77.7%	4.23	1.07
Educate the audience	390	61.3%	3.69	1.18
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	391	65%	3.75	1.11
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	390	69.2%	4.01	1.08
Support national development	390	51.8%	3.59	1.10
Support government policy	390	2%	1.63	0.85
Convey a positive image of political leaders	390	1.5%	1.58	0.80
Provide entertainment and relaxation	391	32%	2.88	1.20
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	390	41.3%	3.15	1.29
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	390	35.1%	3.05	1.13
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	391	52.7%	3.48	1.13
Support efforts to protect public health	391	76.2%	4.11	1.04
Counteract disinformation	391	94.1%	4.70	0.61
Discuss future implications of current events	391	72.4%	3.94	0.92

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 little consensus among professionals regarding journalistic epistemologies (see Table 4). While a majority agree that interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts (67.8%), opinions are divided on whether it is possible to represent objective reality in reporting (52.4%) and whether truth is inevitably shaped by those in power (46.3%). Conversely, journalists largely reject the notion that things can only be true or false, with only 14.8% expressing agreement.

**TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES**

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	391	67.8%	3.89	1.10
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	391	46.3%	3.30	1.22
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	391	22.8%	2.55	1.19
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	391	14.8%	2.15	1.25
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	391	52.4%	3.46	1.19

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

Spanish journalists largely agree that the profession should be governed by professional standards that must be upheld under all circumstances (see Table 5). Conversely, they reject the idea that journalistic ethics is merely a personal matter. Additionally, they generally disapprove of controversial reporting methods (see Table 6). Among the practices listed, only the use of confidential business or government documents without authorization was considered always justified by more than 10% of respondents.

**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	391	66.5%	3.87	1.12
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	389	43.2%	3.19	1.19
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	391	30.7%	2.71	1.36
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	391	14.1%	2.09	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	391	1%	28.4%
Using hidden recording devices	391	3.6%	46%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	390	13.8%	48.9%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	391	9.7%	46.5%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	391	2%	19.4%
Paying people for confidential information	391	2%	28.1%
Accepting money from sources	391	0.3%	3.3%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	391	2%	22%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	391	1.8%	20.7%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	391	0.3%	12%

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

The results for these variables appear contradictory. On one hand, most Spanish journalists report having a great deal or complete freedom in selecting the news they cover (71.6%) and in deciding which aspects to emphasize (76.7%). On the other hand, they perceive media freedom in Spain as limited (see Table 7). In fact, only 16.4% of respondents believe there is a great deal or complete media freedom, while 34.3% state that there is little or no media freedom at all – despite feeling quite free in their individual journalistic choices.

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

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	391	71.6%	3.93	1.00
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	391	76.7%	4.08	0.85
Media freedom in Spain	391	16.4%	2.80	0.78

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

## EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Journalists report being primarily influenced by factors directly related to journalistic routines (see Table 8): journalistic ethics (4.25 on a 1–5 scale), access to information (3.76), time constraints (3.64), and relationships with sources (3.45). Regarding interpersonal influences, they acknowledge being somewhat influenced by their supervisors (3.69) and peers (3.41). In contrast, they report limited influence from power or pressure groups. None of these groups scored above 2.5: politicians (2.36), businesspeople (2.32), public relations professionals (2.29), police (2.18), issue advocacy groups (2.25), or government officials (1.87).

**TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES**

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	377	49.6%	3.41	1.13
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	354	61.3%	3.69	1.09
The business managers of the news organization	355	37.2%	2.94	1.34
The owners of the news organization	351	37.9%	2.98	1.40
Editorial policy	360	46.7%	3.28	1.27
Advertising considerations	361	32.7%	2.83	1.28
Profit expectations	369	34.1%	2.89	1.30
Audience research and data	376	38%	3.10	1.21
Availability of news-gathering resources	388	45.1%	3.38	1.16
Time limits	388	58.8%	3.64	1.13
Journalism ethics	389	82%	4.25	0.93
Self-censorship	385	25.7%	2.73	1.21
Personal values and beliefs	385	40.8%	3.08	1.34
Colleagues in other media	370	8.9%	2.05	1.02
Friends, acquaintances and family	371	12.9%	2.12	1.13
Feedback from the audience	382	21.5%	2.65	1.09
Competing news organizations	381	17.6%	2.51	1.10
Media laws and regulation	376	27.4%	2.77	1.24
Access to information	389	61.2%	3.76	0.98
Government censorship	360	19.7%	2.28	1.35
Government officials	370	10.3%	1.87	1.10
Politicians	377	20.2%	2.36	1.25
Business people	380	17.9%	2.32	1.19
Public relations	381	16.3%	2.29	1.10
Relationships with news sources	388	46.7%	3.45	1.08
Police	373	16.9%	2.18	1.21
Issue advocacy groups	379	13.2%	2.25	1.09
Scientists or health experts	380	27.9%	2.62	1.26

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.)