

Switzerland

VINZENZ WYSS, FILIP DINGERKUS, LOUIS SCHÄFER, GUIDO KEEL, ANNIK DUBIED, NATHALIE PIGNARD-CHEYNEL, JULIEN PERROT & COLIN PORLEZZA

INTRODUCTION

In 2025, Switzerland remains one of the world's most politically stable nations. Rule-of-law institutions and direct democracy enjoy high public trust and civic participation. The economy is highly developed and diversified, with key sectors such as financial services, pharmaceuticals, and technology. Switzerland's economy shows notable resilience, even amid global crises. The country maintains a high quality of life, supported by strong education and healthcare systems. Public debates focus on affordable housing, digitalization, demographic change, and migration.

Switzerland's journalistic landscape is diverse, with a high density of journalists and a mix of public and private media. Press freedom remains strong. However, media concentration is increasing, and financial pressures have led to significant staff reductions. Several studies point to rising anti-media sentiments and declining trust in media. At the same time, legal pressures in corporate and financial reporting are increasing, with Article 47 of the Swiss Banking Act remaining a key concern for investigative journalists.

The fieldwork for this study took place in 2023, in a media environment still shaped by the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as by broader challenges such as digital transformation, economic instability, political polarization, and declining professionalism.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

43.6% of Swiss journalists are women, a further increase compared to previous studies. On average, they are 42.9 years old (SD = 11.46, Median = 42.0). 80.0% have an academic degree (bachelor's degree or equivalent: 27.6%, master's degree or diploma: 48.6%, doctorate: 3.8%), reflecting the profession's growing academization. 48.5% hold a university or college degree with a focus on journalism and media; 93.5% have formal education or professional training in journalism, 65.6% have an apprenticeship/cadetship, and 30.5% have taken short-term courses.

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

More than one third of journalists in Switzerland worked for an employer that has its roots in radio (39.0%) or newspapers (36.9%). 8.4% worked for magazine companies, 7.0% native internet, 6.4% television, 3.1% news agencies. Very few journalists worked for an organization with a telecommunications background (0.5%, respectively). In terms of ownership 57.5% work in private/commercial media, 33.0% in public service media, 3.2% in non-profit media, and 2.2% in community/citizen media. Most journalists (68.9%) do not hold a leadership role in their organization, 17.8% hold a partial, and 13.3% a full leadership role. Lastly, regarding coverage area, 60.8% work for national or international media, 35.3% for regional or local. 3.9% report no main medium.

On average, Swiss journalists have 16.4 years of professional experience (SD = 10.51, Median = 15.0). 48.0% are assigned to a specific beat or topic area, while 52.0% write about a variety of topics. 50.9% are members of a professional association representing journalistic interests.

Nearly half of the sample had full-time contracts (36.8% permanently and 12.0% temporarily employed). 36.2% had a permanent part-time and 10.0% a temporarily part-time employment. 4.5% are freelance journalists or self-employed, and 0.5% reported another employment status. The proportion of temporary contracts increased by roughly 17% compared to 2015, which can be seen as a consequence of the negative economic developments. 228 journalists (19.3%) also stated that they have a part-time job in addition to journalism.

The average working time is 37.6 hours per week (SD = 9.18, Median = 40.0). 50.7% report having experienced frequent or very frequent stress in the past six months, while 12.4% report little or no stress.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Swiss journalists are most affected by occupational threats, such as demeaning or hateful speech directed at them or public discrediting of their work (Table 1). While threats from authorities or state institutions are less frequent, 18.5% have experienced surveillance by authorities at least rarely, and 17.8% have faced legal actions because of their work. Personal threats are also relatively uncommon; however, 22.2% report workplace bullying, and 16.2% have experienced the dissemination of personal information. Mental well-being is the top concern for 38.7% of journalists (Table 2). Additionally, 33.8% are concerned that attacks against journalists in Switzerland go unpunished.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	1177	1.6%	6.7%	28.9%	35.3%	27.5%
Public discrediting of your work	1177	1.4%	6.9%	26.2%	32.3%	33.2%
Surveillance	1168	0.1%	1.5%	5.1%	11.8%	81.5%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	1178	0.0%	0.6%	1.9%	7.8%	89.7%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	1178	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.8%	98.9%
Legal actions against you because of your work	1179	0.3%	1.0%	4.8%	11.7%	82.2%
Stalking	1174	0.1%	0.7%	2.6%	9.6%	87.0%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	1176	0.3%	2.2%	9.7%	24.6%	63.3%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	1179	0.0%	0.6%	2.7%	6.5%	90.2%
Other physical attacks	1176	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	3.7%	95.5%
Others disseminating your personal information	1177	0.0%	0.6%	2.7%	13.5%	83.2%
Workplace bullying	1178	0.6%	1.9%	7.3%	12.4%	77.8%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	1179	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	4.9%	94.3%

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	1178	12.1%	1.97	1.07
Concerned about physical well-being	1176	22.4%	2.27	1.21
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	1177	38.7%	2.76	1.30
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Switzerland go unpunished	1177	33.8%	2.70	1.27

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

Swiss journalists primarily identify with critical-monitoring roles, such as "provide information people need to form political opinion" (85.5%) and "be a detached observer" (79.6%). Collaborative roles (e.g. "support national development" 13.0%, "support government policy" 1.7%) and interventionist roles ("influence public opinion" 11.6%) are less important.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	1173	79.6%	4.17	0.95
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	1172	55.1%	3.44	1.24
Shine a light on society's problems	1175	70.3%	3.88	0.98
Motivate people to participate in politics	1173	41.0%	3.14	1.14
Provide analysis of current affairs	1173	77.6%	4.10	0.92
Let people express their views	1171	50.6%	3.43	1.02
Provide information people need to form political opinion	1173	85.6%	4.32	0.86
Advocate for social change	1171	20.8%	2.58	1.11
Influence public opinion	1164	11.6%	2.28	1.03
Set the political agenda	1168	11.4%	2.24	1.03
Promote peace and tolerance	1168	32.6%	3.02	1.10
Educate the audience	1165	53.4%	3.49	1.01
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	1170	53.8%	3.49	0.98
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	1171	40.3%	3.23	1.05
Support national development	1156	13.0%	2.31	1.03
Support government policy	1168	1.6%	1.47	0.72
Convey a positive image of political leaders	1169	1.2%	1.36	0.67
Provide entertainment and relaxation	1171	31.8%	2.89	1.16
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	1170	49.5%	3.41	1.06
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	1169	43.5%	3.25	1.09
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	1174	57.3%	3.57	1.04
Support efforts to protect public health	1167	21.3%	2.58	1.09
Counteract disinformation	1172	77.7%	4.12	0.96
Discuss future implications of current events	1170	65.2%	3.72	0.94

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

Swiss journalists hold varying views regarding journalistic epistemology (Table 4). The strongest consensus appears on the statement “things are either true or false, there is no in-between”, with 5.3% agreeing versus 83.9% disagreeing, and 10.9% unsure. The most contested view is “interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts”, with 58.0% agreeing versus 26.7% disagreeing, and 15.4% unsure.

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	1114	58.0%	3.35	1.13
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	1113	25.6%	2.59	1.08
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	1118	31.6%	2.70	1.16
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	1119	5.3%	1.71	0.90
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	1118	64.5%	3.52	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

Swiss journalists strongly prioritize professional standards over subjective considerations in ethical reporting (Table 5). They widely reject practices such as accepting money from sources or disguising promotional content as news (Table 6). However, most find it acceptable to use hidden recording devices, confidential business or government documents without authorization, and personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission, though typically only when deemed justified.

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	1167	70.7%	3.79	1.06
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	1162	49.5%	3.17	1.18
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	1165	34.4%	2.72	1.20
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	1165	8.3%	1.81	0.98

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	1174	0.3%	52.4%
Using hidden recording devices	1174	1.6%	69.7%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	1173	9.3%	75.3%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	1174	2.9%	71.5%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	1169	0.3%	18.4%
Paying people for confidential information	1177	0.3%	25.5%
Accepting money from sources	1175	0.0%	1.4%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	1171	0.9%	25.7%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	1172	0.0%	6.1%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	1174	0.3%	38.2%

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 vast majority of Swiss journalists feel free in their work, regarding topic selection and the framing of their stories (Table 7). About two-thirds (66.2%) of respondents believe that Swiss media enjoy a great deal or complete freedom.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	1177	71.8%	3.80	0.74
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	1176	79.3%	3.97	0.70
Media freedom in Switzerland	1159	66.2%	3.68	0.66

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Swiss journalists consider journalistic ethics by far the most important internal factor influencing their work, cited by 78.8%, followed by time limits at 62.0% and the availability of news-gathering resources at 59.2% (Table 8). Among external factors, access to information (45.6%), media laws and regulation (27.6%), and relationships with news sources (27.1%) are most frequently considered extremely or very influential.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	1123	34.1%	3.07	0.95
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	1116	39.8%	3.18	1.02
The business managers of the news organization	1077	13.0%	2.19	1.07
The owners of the news organization	1022	8.9%	1.92	1.05
Editorial policy	1111	41.0%	3.16	1.11
Advertising considerations	1032	9.5%	1.84	1.03
Profit expectations	1046	13.2%	2.06	1.13
Audience research and data	1099	24.4%	2.66	1.14
Availability of news-gathering resources	1106	59.2%	3.61	1.01
Time limits	1132	61.9%	3.71	0.94
Journalism ethics	1124	78.8%	4.03	0.89
Self-censorship	1052	7.9%	2.10	0.95
Personal values and beliefs	1112	46.9%	3.31	1.04
Colleagues in other media	1107	5.2%	2.07	0.90
Friends, acquaintances and family	1120	9.0%	2.18	0.94
Feedback from the audience	1124	21.8%	2.79	0.95
Competing news organizations	1109	16.1%	2.54	0.99
Media laws and regulation	1079	27.5%	2.72	1.15
Access to information	1095	45.6%	3.21	1.10
Government censorship	1067	2.2%	1.31	0.66
Government officials	1094	5.0%	1.74	0.89
Politicians	1099	8.2%	1.99	0.99
Business people	1090	5.2%	1.82	0.92
Public relations	1091	8.7%	2.14	0.97
Relationships with news sources	1107	27.1%	2.77	1.09
Police	1078	4.2%	1.56	0.85
Issue advocacy groups	1100	6.3%	2.03	0.93

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.)