

Taiwan

HUEI-LING LIU, SHIH-CHIEN CHANG, CHIUNG-WEN HSU & HSIU FENG CHEN

INTRODUCTION

Taiwan is a liberal democracy and the world's 21st largest economy known for its stable political transitions and a high degree of freedom of speech for its citizens. According to the 2025 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, Taiwan ranks fifth out of 180 countries in security, 23rd in political stability, and 26th in quality of life. In the 2025 Freedom in the World report by Freedom House, Taiwan scores 94 out of 100, ranking second in the Asia region and seventh worldwide.

In this free and diverse society, the media industry thrives. Television is the dominant medium, featuring five terrestrial TV stations and twelve satellite news channels. In addition, Taiwan has one national news agency and five major newspapers with nationwide circulation.

In recent years, online media outlets and social media have rapidly developed, becoming significant sources of information for the public. However, as digital convergence progresses, print media are generally facing declining revenues and staff reductions. Similarly, while radio has also declined, public radio stations continue to provide local news services. As a result, many organizations are actively pursuing digital transformation strategies. For journalists, multitasking and real-time news production have become integral parts of their daily routines.

The survey for this study took place between September 1 and October 31, 2023; a total of 448 journalists participated in it. After excluding invalid responses, a total of 439 journalists were included in the final sample.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Our sample of Taiwanese journalists comprises 43.2% women and 56.6% men. The average age of the journalists is 41.4 years (SD = 10.9; Median = 41). They are generally well-educated, with 65.2% holding a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, 32.7% possessing a Master's degree or equivalent, and 0.2% having obtained a doctorate. Additionally, 81.0% of the respondents have received formal education or professional training in journalism. This education is primarily acquired at universities or colleges (71.9%), while others gain experience through apprenticeships or cadetships (25.9%) and short-term courses (4.8%).

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In Taiwan, survey results indicate that 58.5% of journalists are employed in an organization with a television background, while companies with a newspaper background employ 19.6%. An increasing number of journalists, accounting for 12.8%, are working in digital native media. Other types of media represent smaller percentages, with magazines at 2.3%, radio at 3.4%, and news agencies at 2.8%. Additionally, 0.5% of respondents reported that they do not have a primary employer.

The average professional experience among journalists in Taiwan is 15.3 years (SD = 10.2, Median = 14.5). Most journalists (77.2%) cover a single news beat, while only 22.8% engage in multi-beat reporting. Notably, membership in professional associations is relatively low among Taiwanese journalists; only 30.2% of respondents reported being members, while 69.8% do not participate.

In terms of employment status, over 90% (94.5%) of Taiwanese journalists are full-time employees. Only 4.3% are on full-time fixed-term contracts, 0.9% are part-time with formal contracts, and freelancers make up just 0.2%. This suggests that, despite the industry's declining revenues, media organizations in Taiwan continue to prioritize hiring full-time editorial staff.

On average, journalists in Taiwan work 47.9 hours per week (SD = 18.3, Median = 50), which exceeds the national legal standard of 40 working hours per week. Although the media environment in Taiwan is highly competitive, only 37.4% of respondents reported feeling "frequent" or "very frequent" work-related stress in the past six months. In contrast, 62.6% indicated that they experience stress "sometimes," while 31.2% reported that they "never" or "rarely" feel stressed at work.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

The most commonly reported threats include public discrediting, with 68.9% of respondents affected, and hateful speech, which has impacted 74.3%. Other common threats that journalists have encountered include surveillance (32.6%), legal actions taken against them because of their work (31.6%), and various other threats or intimidation tactics (34.3%), based on responses indicating these experiences occurred “very often,” “often,” or “sometimes.”

In response to these threats, more than half of the respondents expressed strong agreement with two concerns: their physical well-being (59.4%) and their emotional and mental well-being (51.4%). However, only 18.2% of journalists strongly agreed with the statement about fearing job loss (Table 2).

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	438	6.8%	9.8%	18.0%	39.6%	25.5%
Public discrediting of your work	437	10.8%	14.4%	16.0%	27.7%	31.1%
Surveillance	436	1.6%	2.5%	9.2%	19.3%	67.4%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	436	0.2%	0.7%	4.1%	11.9%	83.0%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	438	0.2%	0.0%	0.9%	1.1%	97.7%
Legal actions against you because of your work	437	0.2%	0.9%	6.0%	24.5%	68.4%
Stalking	437	0.0%	0.5%	1.6%	5.7%	92.2%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	437	0.9%	2.1%	7.1%	24.3%	65.7%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	438	0.2%	0.5%	3.0%	10.7%	85.6%
Other physical attacks	437	0.2%	0.2%	3.2%	10.1%	86.3%
Coercion	437	0.7%	0.9%	4.1%	20.8%	73.5%
Questioning of your personal morality	436	1.2%	2.3%	6.2%	15.6%	74.8%
Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories	438	0.7%	0.7%	3.4%	9.1%	86.1%
Others disseminating your personal information	437	0.2%	0.9%	3.9%	10.5%	84.4%
Workplace bullying	437	1.8%	2.1%	5.3%	15.3%	75.5%
Abductions	437	0.2%	0.0%	0.5%	0.2%	99.1%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	438	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	1.8%	97.5%
Intimidation that targets family	438	0.2%	0.0%	0.7%	0.5%	98.6%

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	438	18.2%	2.38	1.12
Concerned about physical well-being	438	59.4%	3.48	1.14
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	438	51.4%	3.28	1.22
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Taiwan go unpunished	438	47.7%	3.27	1.16

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

Among the different roles in journalism, Taiwanese journalists prioritize traditional watchdog functions as the most important. Specifically, 85.7% of them value being a detached observer, while 83.6% believe it is crucial to illuminate societal problems. In contrast, the least valued roles are conveying a positive image of political leaders, which only 13.7% consider important, and supporting government policy, seen as important by just 29.2% (Table 3).

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	439	85.7%	4.22	0.82
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	438	77.4%	4.01	1.00
Shine a light on society’s problems	438	83.6%	4.24	0.83
Motivate people to participate in politics	438	34.7%	3.20	1.00
Provide analysis of current affairs	439	76.8%	4.05	0.87
Let people express their views	438	73.1%	3.98	0.93
Provide information people need to form political opinion	438	63.5%	3.75	1.00
Advocate for social change	437	63.6%	3.77	0.98
Influence public opinion	439	52.2%	3.50	1.03
Set the political agenda	438	39.7%	3.23	1.08
Promote peace and tolerance	438	75.3%	3.68	1.05
Educate the audience	438	58.7%	4.03	0.95
Point toward possible solutions to society’s problems	439	74.9%	3.97	0.95
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	438	81.5%	4.22	0.94
Support national development	438	57.3%	3.65	1.03
Support government policy	438	29.2%	3.04	1.04
Convey a positive image of political leaders	439	13.7%	2.39	1.07
Provide entertainment and relaxation	438	34.7%	3.11	1.00
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	438	60.3%	3.72	1.04
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	437	63.4%	3.71	0.95
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	439	68.8%	3.86	0.95
Support efforts to protect public health	438	71.0%	3.90	0.96
Counteract disinformation	438	83.8%	4.24	0.90
Discuss future implications of current events	437	75.5%	4.01	0.95

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

Taiwanese journalists hold strong epistemological views rooted in the principles of traditional journalism, highlighting the importance of basing news on factual information (93.4%). They believe that when a source's claim is questionable, journalists have a responsibility to inform the audience (87.2%). The idea that journalists can intuitively determine the direction of a story in advance is the least accepted among them, with only 1.4% strongly agreeing with this perspective (Table 4).

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	438	88.4%	4.13	0.72
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	438	22.6%	2.41	1.17
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	438	68.7%	3.64	0.89
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	438	9.4%	2.17	0.89
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	437	57.4%	3.43	1.05
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	438	20.1%	2.56	0.93
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	438	1.4%	2.63	0.99
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	438	93.4%	4.28	0.67
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	436	11.2%	2.37	0.89
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	436	18.6%	2.54	1.01
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	437	87.2%	4.18	0.78

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

As indicated in Tables 5 and 6, Taiwanese journalists generally adopt a situational approach to ethical considerations in their journalistic practices, with 86.1% expressing this viewpoint. Most journalists believe that the use of controversial methods to obtain information should be determined by the circumstances and may not always be considered unjustified. This includes practices such as using hidden recording devices (80.1%), utilizing personal materials from influential individuals – such as documents and photos – without their permission (54.0%), and accessing confidential business or government documents without authorization (52.6%).

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	439	40.3%	3.01	1.06
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	439	57.6%	3.37	0.95
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	438	86.1%	3.95	0.72
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	438	12.6%	2.21	0.95

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	439	0.5%	18.9%
Using hidden recording devices	438	2.1%	80.1%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	437	1.4%	52.6%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	437	2.5%	54.0%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	439	0.5%	36.5%
Paying people for confidential information	438	1.1%	41.3%
Accepting money from sources	438	0.7%	14.4%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	437	2.8%	38.9%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	438	6.9%	46.4%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	437	0.9%	17.2%

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

Only about 40% of Taiwanese journalists believe they have a significant amount of editorial autonomy. The responses across the three indicators shown in Table 7 reveal minimal variation. This may indicate that political and commercial influences have increasingly impacted Taiwan's media in recent years, exerting pressure on press freedom.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	438	43.4%	3.18	0.99
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	437	41.2%	3.16	0.97
Media freedom in Taiwan	437	40.5%	3.15	0.91

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Taiwanese journalists identify several key factors that influence news production, with time constraints being the most significant, cited by 52.6% of respondents (Table 8). This trend reflects the pressures of the digital age, where speed is prioritized, often leading to a compromise in the quality of reporting due to the rush to publish news instantly.

The second most influential factor, mentioned by 49.0% of journalists, is the role of business managers within news organizations. This finding aligns with concerns about editorial autonomy. In recent years, intensified market competition and the loss of advertising revenue to online platforms have led to a shift in media content toward market-driven priorities. As a result, business departments sometimes intervene in editorial decisions.

Additionally, audience data, including metrics like clicks and views, play a significant role in shaping news content. In fact, 46.4% of journalists report that these metrics influence their reporting, which highlights the impact of market competition. It's also important to note that Taiwan is a stable society governed by the rule of law, where the influence of gangs or organized crime on editorial policy is very minimal.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	438	8.0%	1.97	1.01
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	438	43.2%	3.13	1.23
The business managers of the news organization	437	49.0%	3.26	1.29
The owners of the news organization	437	39.1%	2.92	1.47
Editorial policy	438	37.0%	3.00	1.21
Advertising considerations	437	31.1%	2.72	1.37
Profit expectations	437	30.7%	2.68	1.34
Audience research and data	427	46.4%	3.27	1.30
Availability of news-gathering resources	438	23.7%	2.75	1.09
Time limits	437	52.6%	3.43	1.11
Journalism ethics	437	34.3%	3.04	1.09
Self-censorship	437	24.9%	2.81	1.11
Personal values and beliefs	438	34.3%	3.03	1.08
Colleagues in other media	438	16.0%	2.37	1.11
Friends, acquaintances and family	437	4.8%	1.65	0.96
Feedback from the audience	438	20.6%	2.60	1.07
Competing news organizations	437	30.9%	2.81	1.19
Media laws and regulation	438	32.2%	2.89	1.23
Access to information	438	34.5%	3.07	1.03
Government censorship	438	21.9%	2.47	1.21
Government officials	438	16.0%	2.27	1.17
Politicians	438	17.6%	2.28	1.20
Business people	438	13.5%	2.16	1.18
Public relations	438	18.3%	2.44	1.14
Relationships with news sources	437	23.8%	2.70	1.10
Police	438	9.8%	2.01	1.10
Issue advocacy groups	438	8.9%	2.00	1.04
Scientists or health experts	438	10.7%	1.75	1.00
Religious groups and institutions	438	5.7%	1.56	0.90
Military	438	3.9%	1.33	0.71
Para-military groups, militias and similar groups	438	11.4%	1.30	0.70
Organized crime and criminal groups	438	1.6%	1.20	0.61
Terrorist groups	438	1.4%	2.06	1.08

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.)