

Ukraine¹

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INTRODUCTION

As of 2025, Ukraine is in the fourth year of war following Russia's full-scale invasion launched in February 2022. The ongoing war, with an active frontline of several hundred kilometers and daily air attacks on towns and communities across the entire country, has been shaping nearly all aspects of political, economic, and social life. With the loss of roughly a third of GDP, destruction of critical infrastructure, and the need to fund the army to fight back the aggression, Ukraine is struggling economically. The humanitarian and demographic toll of the war is also grave. Despite such pivotal challenges, the country continues its efforts to stand up to the aggression and protect its sovereignty.

The war has also shaken Ukraine's media landscape. After Ukraine declared independence in 1991, journalists experienced a major post-communist transition as new private media owners defined the agenda and approach to journalism. An oligarch-dominated media environment contributed to the instrumentalization of journalism, though a handful of independent media, by and large, ensured the pluralism of information. Despite attempts of pressure and censorship, both from private owners and the state, Ukraine's media landscape remained partly free. Recent years have seen the strengthening of media, independent from the political influence of their owners, mostly due to foreign donor support, which increased after the Euromaidan Revolution and subsequent democratization reforms.

After the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian oligarchs essentially lost control of their media along with other lost assets in a broken economy. The government, however, reinforced its influence, particularly through the United National TV Marathon, a coalition of broadcasters providing a unified coverage of the news during the war. The TV Marathon has drawn criticism from observers and journalists for information management. Martial law has also posed restrictions for journalism. Safety concerns, financial difficulties, and a deficit of human resources are crucial issues for Ukrainian journalists.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Our sample of Ukrainian journalists includes more women than men (68.1% vs. 31.9%, respectively). On average, journalists were 39.1 years old ($SD = 11.2$; Median = 38). They are generally very well educated: 23.2% of them held a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, 67.6% a Master's degree or equivalent, and an additional 5.9% have obtained a doctorate. Moreover, 68.1% of the respondents have acquired formal education or professional training in journalism. This education or training is usually obtained at university or in college (78.6%) but also via apprenticeships or cadetships (54.8%) and short-term courses (36.5%).

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

The Ukrainian journalists in our sample were evenly spread in terms of management roles – 39.2% did not have a management role, 27.1% were in a middle management role and 33.7% in a top management role.

More than three quarters of the interviewed journalists in Ukraine had a full-time contract (69.7% permanently and 7.6% temporarily employed). 11.4% worked as freelancers or were self-employed, and an additional 5.4% had other forms of employment. Finally, 4.3% had a part-time permanent contract, and 1.6% had a part-time temporary contract. While these results do not suggest a precarious employment situation, the fact that 47.6% of the respondents reported that they had additional jobs outside journalism shows that this might be the case.

On average, Ukrainian journalists had 15.3 years of professional experience ($SD = 9.3$; Median = 14.5). A majority of them (77.8%) worked on a variety of beats or subject areas rather than on a single one. Less than half (44.9%) were members of professional associations.

The average working week of Ukrainian full-time journalists was 43.0 hours ($SD = 17.5$; Median = 40). In terms of the background of their main employers, more than half of journalists in Ukraine (54.6%) worked for native online media, 15.7% for a TV organization, 13.5% for news agencies, 9.2% for newspapers, and 2.7% for radio, respectively. Very few journalists worked for magazine companies and organizations with a telecommunications background (0.5%, respectively). Finally, 15.5% of the interviewed journalists claimed not to have a main employer. Regarding area of coverage, 64.2% of the journalists reported they mainly worked for (trans)national media, while 35.0% primarily catered to local or regional media.

Remarkably, more than two thirds of the respondents (70.3%) reported they felt stressed out at work often or very often during the previous six months; only 8.1% had rarely felt that way and no one said they had never felt stressed out at work.

¹ Country sample does not fully align with WJS specifications regarding maximum margin of error (see WJS3 Methodology).

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Attacks such as demeaning or hateful speech or public discrediting of journalists’ work as well as questioning of their personal morality fared among the most common safety threats experienced by Ukrainian journalists (see Table 1). Digital threats such as hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites were also evident as well as stalking and legal actions against them. The vast majority of Ukrainian journalists were concerned that those who harm journalists would go unpunished. More than two thirds were worried about their emotional and mental well-being, and over half about their physical well-being (see Table 2). About a third of the surveyed journalists were concerned about losing their job in journalism in the next 12 months.

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS

| | N | Very often | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
|--|-----|------------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|
| Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you | 185 | 6.5% | 7.6% | 39.5% | 29.2% | 17.3% |
| Public discrediting of your work | 185 | 3.8% | 9.2% | 30.8% | 27.6% | 28.6% |
| Surveillance | 185 | 1.1% | 1.1% | 8.6% | 14.6% | 74.6% |
| Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites | 185 | 2.2% | 3.8% | 16.8% | 27.0% | 50.3% |
| Arrests, detentions or imprisonment | 185 | 0.5% | 0.0% | 1.1% | 3.8% | 94.6% |
| Legal actions against you because of your work | 185 | 0.5% | 2.2% | 5.4% | 15.7% | 76.2% |
| Stalking | 185 | 1.1% | 0.5% | 6.5% | 9.2% | 82.7% |
| Other threats or intimidations directed at you | 185 | 1.1% | 2.7% | 16.8% | 29.7% | 49.7% |
| Sexual assault or sexual harassment | 185 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.5% | 6.5% | 93.0% |
| Other physical attacks | 185 | 0.0% | 1.1% | 1.6% | 10.3% | 87.0% |
| Coercion | 185 | 1.1% | 1.6% | 4.9% | 16.8% | 75.7% |
| Questioning of your personal morality | 185 | 4.9% | 5.4% | 25.0% | 35.1% | 34.1% |
| Others using your byline for fabricated or manipulated stories | 185 | 3.2% | 1.1% | 8.6% | 13.5% | 73.5% |
| Others disseminating your personal information | 185 | 1.1% | 2.2% | 12.4% | 23.2% | 61.1% |
| Workplace bullying | 185 | 1.6% | 1.6% | 5.9% | 15.7% | 75.1% |
| Abductions | 185 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.5% | 0.0% | 99.5% |
| Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment | 185 | 1.1% | 0.5% | 0.5% | 6.5% | 91.4% |
| Intimidation that targets family | 185 | 1.1% | 0.5% | 2.2% | 10.8% | 85.4% |

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 | 185 | 34.1% | 2.95 | 1.22 |
| Concerned about physical well-being | 185 | 54.1% | 3.45 | 1.10 |
| Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing | 185 | 69.2% | 3.88 | 0.99 |
| Concerned that those who harm journalists in Ukraine go unpunished | 185 | 83.2% | 4.16 | 0.78 |

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

Ukrainian journalists showed the strongest support for the countering disinformation role, which is understandable in the context of the current war with Russia (see Table 3). Similarly, shine a light on society’s problems, support national development and discuss future implications of current events are the next three most important roles. The results also reveal an inclination towards the interventionist role and the monitorial role to a lesser degree. The collaborative role, instead, found very weak support despite the major challenges of external threats.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

| | N | Very/extremely important | Mean | SD |
|---|-----|-----------------------------|------|------|
| Be a detached observer | 185 | 31.4% | 2.96 | 1.15 |
| Monitor and scrutinize those in power | 185 | 77.3% | 4.18 | 1.07 |
| Shine a light on society’s problems | 185 | 88.6% | 4.54 | 0.77 |
| Motivate people to participate in politics | 185 | 50.8% | 3.45 | 1.20 |
| Provide analysis of current affairs | 185 | 76.8% | 4.18 | 0.94 |
| Let people express their views | 185 | 65.9% | 3.94 | 1.19 |
| Provide information people need to form political opinion | 185 | 61.1% | 3.74 | 1.17 |
| Advocate for social change | 185 | 74.1% | 4.05 | 1.01 |
| Influence public opinion | 185 | 57.8% | 3.68 | 1.13 |
| Set the political agenda | 185 | 21.1% | 2.65 | 1.13 |
| Promote peace and tolerance | 185 | 62.2% | 3.78 | 1.17 |
| Educate the audience | 185 | 80.0% | 4.26 | 0.94 |
| Point toward possible solutions to society’s problems | 185 | 76.2% | 4.09 | 0.99 |
| Speak on behalf of the marginalized | 185 | 21.1% | 2.56 | 1.27 |
| Support national development | 185 | 78.4% | 4.21 | 1.00 |
| Support government policy | 185 | 7.6% | 2.09 | 0.92 |
| Convey a positive image of political leaders | 185 | 2.2% | 1.48 | 0.75 |
| Provide entertainment and relaxation | 185 | 5.9% | 1.98 | 0.97 |
| Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience | 185 | 20.5% | 2.59 | 1.20 |
| Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life | 185 | 26.5% | 2.82 | 1.21 |
| Tell stories that emotionally move the audience | 185 | 47.0% | 3.43 | 1.10 |
| Support efforts to protect public health | 185 | 61.6% | 3.77 | 1.07 |
| Counteract disinformation | 185 | 94.6% | 4.78 | 0.57 |
| Discuss future implications of current events | 185 | 78.4% | 4.19 | 0.88 |

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

Ukrainian journalists' responses to the epistemological questions seem to be again affected by the ongoing war as for almost all journalists it was most important to alert their audiences about untruthful claims, followed by letting the facts speak for themselves (Table 4). The majority of journalists also believed that truth is inevitably shaped by those in power. Only 5.4% felt it was possible to represent objective reality in reporting. (see Table 4).

TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

| | N | Agree/ strongly agree | Mean | SD |
|--|-----|--------------------------|------|------|
| Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts | 185 | 18.8% | 2.71 | 0.96 |
| Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power | 185 | 76.8% | 4.03 | 0.82 |
| It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting | 185 | 57.3% | 3.58 | 0.95 |
| Things are either true or false, there is no in-between | 185 | 17.8% | 2.54 | 1.07 |
| It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting | 185 | 5.4% | 2.15 | 0.82 |
| Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not | 185 | 15.1% | 2.63 | 0.91 |
| Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be | 182 | 18.1% | 2.77 | 0.87 |
| Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves | 184 | 78.8% | 3.92 | 0.74 |
| Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately | 185 | 34.6% | 3.06 | 1.02 |
| Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work | 182 | 56.0% | 3.46 | 1.05 |
| Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful | 182 | 89.0% | 4.29 | 0.74 |

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

Journalists in Ukraine strongly agreed on the importance of professional standards rather than subjective and situational considerations for ethical reporting (see Table 5) although over half said that extraordinary circumstances might require disregarding those professional standards. When it comes to the justification of controversial reporting methods, however, producing promotional stories and publishing unverified stories were most strongly rejected (see Table 6). Most journalists found it acceptable to use hidden recording devices and use confidential documents without authorization.

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 | 185 | 67.0% | 3.83 | 1.01 |
| What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them | 185 | 52.4% | 3.43 | 1.00 |
| What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation | 185 | 24.9% | 2.56 | 1.14 |
| What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment | 185 | 18.4% | 2.37 | 1.15 |

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 | 185 | 0.0% | 54.6% |
| Using hidden recording devices | 185 | 1.1% | 77.3% |
| Using confidential business or government documents without authorization | 185 | 1.6% | 57.3% |
| Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission | 185 | 5.9% | 60.0% |
| Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission | 185 | 1.6% | 29.7% |
| Paying people for confidential information | 185 | 3.2% | 48.6% |
| Accepting money from sources | 185 | 0.0% | 14.1% |
| Accepting a free product or service from sources | 185 | 5.9% | 36.8% |
| Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature | 185 | 0.0% | 17.8% |
| Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified | 185 | 1.1% | 22.2% |

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

Ukrainian journalists reported a high degree of internal autonomy, with the vast majority claiming to have a great deal or complete freedom in selecting their stories and in deciding which aspects to emphasize in a story. However, they reported a much lower external autonomy in terms of media freedom in Ukraine (see Table 7). This trend applies across the region.

TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

| | N | A great deal/ complete freedom | Mean | SD |
|---|-----|-----------------------------------|------|------|
| Freedom in selecting the news stories | 185 | 81.6% | 4.06 | 0.76 |
| Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized | 185 | 83.8% | 4.18 | 0.72 |
| Media freedom in Ukraine | 179 | 52.0% | 3.47 | 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

Ukrainian journalists found journalism ethics, availability of news-gathering resources, personal values and beliefs, and editorial policy to fare highest among the internal factors influencing news production (see Table 8). Among the external factors, most journalists considered access to information, media laws and regulation as being extremely or very influential. The military was also very or extremely influential for nearly half of the respondents, which can be explained by the war context.

TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

| | N | Very/extremely influential | Mean | SD |
|---|-----|----------------------------|------|------|
| Peers on the news staff | 177 | 26.6% | 2.92 | 1.05 |
| Editorial supervisors and higher editors | 166 | 53.0% | 3.49 | 1.10 |
| The business managers of the news organization | 159 | 32.1% | 2.85 | 1.25 |
| The owners of the news organization | 147 | 23.8% | 2.55 | 1.31 |
| Editorial policy | 181 | 68.0% | 3.81 | 1.12 |
| Advertising considerations | 149 | 10.7% | 2.00 | 1.07 |
| Profit expectations | 156 | 29.5% | 2.60 | 1.24 |
| Audience research and data | 172 | 48.3% | 3.35 | 1.18 |
| Availability of news-gathering resources | 177 | 68.4% | 3.82 | 1.03 |
| Time limits | 178 | 53.4% | 3.54 | 1.07 |
| Journalism ethics | 182 | 86.3% | 4.26 | 0.87 |
| Self-censorship | 180 | 37.8% | 2.98 | 1.28 |
| Personal values and beliefs | 182 | 68.1% | 3.90 | 1.15 |
| Colleagues in other media | 181 | 11.6% | 2.49 | 0.95 |
| Friends, acquaintances and family | 177 | 10.2% | 2.16 | 1.05 |
| Feedback from the audience | 184 | 42.4% | 3.23 | 0.96 |
| Competing news organizations | 184 | 23.4% | 2.79 | 1.03 |
| Media laws and regulation | 178 | 62.4% | 3.74 | 0.99 |
| Access to information | 183 | 78.7% | 4.10 | 0.83 |
| Government censorship | 171 | 24.0% | 2.46 | 1.32 |
| Government officials | 175 | 11.4% | 2.09 | 1.11 |
| Politicians | 173 | 6.4% | 1.85 | 1.00 |
| Business people | 170 | 7.1% | 1.76 | 0.99 |
| Public relations | 172 | 5.2% | 1.74 | 0.92 |
| Relationships with news sources | 175 | 29.1% | 2.79 | 1.21 |
| Police | 172 | 7.0% | 1.92 | 1.00 |
| Issue advocacy groups | 176 | 17.0% | 2.36 | 1.11 |
| Scientists or health experts | 166 | 21.8% | 1.62 | 0.84 |
| Religious groups and institutions | 179 | 4.2% | 3.28 | 1.19 |
| Military | 168 | 46.4% | 2.49 | 1.22 |
| Para-military groups, militias and similar groups | 160 | 22.6% | 1.24 | 0.65 |
| Organized crime and criminal groups | 154 | 1.9% | 1.29 | 0.82 |
| Terrorist groups | 170 | 3.2% | 2.51 | 1.17 |

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.)