

Executive Summary

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From the rise of populism and the spread of fake news to the mainstreaming of artificial intelligence and the disruptions caused by the pandemic, journalism has experienced—and continues to experience—profound technological, political, economic, and cultural transformations. The Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS) documents and analyzes these changes through global surveys of journalists. In its third wave, WJS captures the perspectives of more than 32,350 journalists from diverse media systems, political regimes, and cultural contexts across 75 countries, providing a bottom-up view that complements institutional metrics and top-down analyses.

This report synthesizes the most important insights from the survey, showing how journalists worldwide navigate disruptions that shape their experiences with press freedom, perceptions of social roles, and beliefs about objectivity and transparency. The chapters that follow offer a rich, multifaceted portrait of today's journalists, revealing not only the challenges they face but also their resilience, adaptability, and professional commitment.

These WJS3 findings offer a crucial foundation for scholars, policymakers, media practitioners, and advocates seeking to support and strengthen journalism's role in society.

PERSONAL BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

- Just under half of the surveyed journalists identified as female, with women forming a numerical majority in 30 countries.
- Significant gender disparities persist in some regions: in 14 countries—particularly in South, Central, and East Asia—women constitute less than one-third of the journalistic workforce.
- The global average age of journalists is nearly 40, indicating a relatively mature workforce, though some countries, such as Poland and Albania, have notably younger demographics.
- The global median professional experience is 14 years, suggesting that journalists typically enter the field in their mid-to-late 20s after completing professional training.
- Most journalists hold college or university degrees, and three-quarters have received some form of professional training.
- Journalists in the Global North are generally older and possess more professional experience than their counterparts in the Global South.

EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

- Most journalists hold full-time contracts, though more than a quarter work as freelancers or part-time employees. Freelancing is particularly common in Latin America, where more than one in five journalists are freelancers, while Italy has the highest global proportion at more than 40%.
- Globally, full-time journalists work on average 43.8 hours per week. Respondents in ten countries reported exceeding the 48-hour weekly limit set by the International Labour Organization.
- Nearly two-thirds of journalists are generalists, covering a range of news beats rather than specializing in a single thematic area.
- Globally, journalists are relatively undercompensated. Salaries often hover around national average wages, prompting almost one-third of journalists to seek a second source of income.
- On average, just over half of journalists belong to a professional association.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED RISKS

- Globally, the most common threats journalists face are psychological and digital, with these threats more prevalent in the Global South than in the Global North.
- Frequently reported psychological threats include demeaning or hateful speech, public discrediting of their work, and attacks on personal morality.
- Impunity is the most significant concern for journalists, as those who harm media professionals often go unpunished. This issue is particularly acute in Latin America.
- Digital surveillance, reported by more than two in five journalists—especially in the Middle East and Asia—has emerged as a major threat, alongside the physical risks posed by working in environments where COVID-19 spread easily.
- Journalists rely primarily on colleagues (more than two-thirds) and their news organizations (more than half) for support.
- To protect themselves, most journalists pay greater attention to fact verification. However, in more than half of the countries surveyed, journalists reported practicing self-censorship. Except for Ukraine, all countries where a majority indicated self-censorship are located in the Global South.

EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND PRESS FREEDOM

- European countries rank highest in perceived editorial autonomy and media freedom, while countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East show greater variability.
- In the Americas, Chile, Costa Rica, and Canada lead in both perceived autonomy and media freedom. In Asia, the Philippines and Nepal score highest in autonomy and perceived freedom, respectively.
- In the Middle East, Israel ranks highest in editorial autonomy and perceived media freedom, while Yemen ranks lowest across all surveyed countries. In Africa, South Africa leads the region on all measures.
- Although the survey data generally align with global indices, some discrepancies highlight the nuanced, context-dependent nature of media freedom. Countries such as Singapore, the Philippines, and Cuba report higher perceived autonomy than their global rankings suggest.
- Countries where journalists report lower perceptions of media freedom are also those where symbolic forms of aggression are more frequent, indicating a clear link between autonomy and safety.
- Overall, journalists often feel free in daily tasks, such as selecting stories, but recognize broader systemic constraints, including political influence, ownership pressures, and legal threats.

PERCEIVED INFLUENCES

- The results show that regional variation is evident in perceived influences on news production. Ethics is considered most influential in North Macedonia, Chile, and the Philippines. Media regulation is strongest in Zambia, North Macedonia, Sierra Leone, and South Africa, while ownership and profit expectations are seen as least influential in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and parts of Europe.
- Overall, procedural and organizational influences are perceived as the most significant, with procedural factors leading globally despite declines in 34 countries—possibly due to digital workflows and online-first strategies.
- Economic pressures on journalism have intensified post-pandemic, although perceptions vary: one-third of countries report a decline in economic influence.
- Political influences are rising, particularly in 15 countries, reflecting growing concerns about external interference in journalistic work.
- Personal network influences remain largely stable but have declined in 20 countries, with Portugal showing the sharpest drop.
- Journalists working in conflict zones report strong influence from military and paramilitary actors, notably in Yemen, Ukraine, and Pakistan.

PERCEPTIONS OF JOURNALISTIC ROLES

- Country-level patterns reflect the influence of political and media systems on journalistic roles. Journalists in authoritarian regimes tend to value collaborative roles more, while those in transitional democracies emphasize interventionist functions.
- Overall, most journalists prioritize roles related to checking political accountability—such as countering disinformation and monitoring those in power—over roles focused on lifestyle coverage or supporting state policy.
- The monitorial role remains dominant globally, with journalists prioritizing informing the public and scrutinizing power, particularly in democratic countries such as Denmark, Canada, and Sweden.
- Collaborative roles are least valued overall, particularly in countries with strong media freedom, but they receive more support in authoritarian contexts and parts of sub-Saharan Africa.
- Interventionist roles gain traction in transitional or politically disrupted environments, including North Cyprus, North Macedonia, and Ukraine.
- Accommodative roles vary regionally, with higher support in Europe and the United States, though this pattern is inconsistent across countries.

JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

- Journalists balance realism with interpretation, recognizing that facts require contextualization rather than representing objective reality in isolation.
- Subjectivity is widely acknowledged, with most journalists agreeing that personal beliefs inevitably influence reporting despite efforts to maintain neutrality.
- Verification and transparency remain core professional norms, with strong support for fact-checking and increasing endorsement of disclosing personal standpoints.
- Some journalists, particularly in conflict-affected or politically complex contexts, view truth as socially constructed, though global consensus on this perspective is limited.
- Journalism is adapting to epistemological diversity, integrating traditional norms with evolving commitments to community engagement and interpretive practices.
- Country-level patterns reveal regional nuances: journalists in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland emphasize nuanced views of truth, while those in Yemen, Ukraine, and Thailand focus more on how power shapes truth.

ETHICAL VIEWS AND PRACTICES

- Most journalists adopt an absolutist approach to ethics, viewing professional standards as universally applicable. Exceptionist, situationist, and subjectivist approaches follow in prevalence.
- Since the last wave, absolutist approaches are decreasing slightly, while support for exceptionist stances is increasing.
- High-income countries in the Global North lean more toward exceptionist ethics, whereas the Global South predominantly favors absolutist ethics.
- Regarding specific practices, journalists were most accepting of hidden recording devices, with around two-thirds deeming them justifiable; however, nearly all rejected accepting money from sources.
- Controversial practices linked to watchdog journalism received greater approval. For example, a majority supported using documents from powerful individuals without permission but were less accepting when ordinary citizens were involved.
- A significant divide emerged regarding promotional journalism disguised as news: most journalists in Europe and North America rejected it outright, while greater tolerance was observed in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, reflecting differing media business pressures.

TECHNOLOGY IN THE NEWSROOM

- The rapid digital shift in journalism has transformed newsroom workflows and created new demands on journalists, who are increasingly expected to master multimedia skills and work under accelerated production timelines.
- Social media has become central to journalistic routines: two-thirds of journalists use it to find sources and news leads, while more than half use it to distribute their stories.
- Despite its importance, social media also poses risks, exposing journalists to harassment and hate speech that can encourage self-censorship.
- One-third of journalists use audience analytics, though there are concerns that overreliance on these tools may push newsrooms to prioritize engagement over the public interest.
- Automation and personalization technologies remain limited: only about one in ten journalists worked in newsrooms that use automated “robot journalism” to generate content, and fewer than one in five use software for personalized news delivery. However, most survey responses were collected before the recent surge in generative AI, which is expected to drive rapid growth in these technologies.

MEDIA PLATFORMS, FORMATS & NEWS CULTURES

- Most journalists knew on which platforms their work would appear. Websites were the most common distribution channel, followed by social media and print, highlighting both the centrality of digital platforms and the continued relevance of traditional platforms.
- The use of messaging apps as a distribution channel has grown rapidly, though global differences are notable: usage is higher in Central and South America, as well as in some countries in Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa. Radio remains important in Africa and Latin America due to its accessibility and low costs.
- In terms of production formats, text is by far the most widely used, followed by photography, video, and audio. Graphics and multimedia formats are less common but show greater variation across countries.
- Most journalists are employed by legacy media organizations, with newspapers accounting for the largest share, followed by television and radio.
- Only about one in five journalists work for internet-native outlets. These outlets are more common in countries with weaker press freedom, where online platforms may offer greater capacity to circumvent censorship.