



Country Report

Journalists in Ecuador

Martin Oller, *University of La Habana and Palmira Chavero, FLACSO*

18 October, 2016

Backgrounds of Journalists

In Ecuador, two thirds of the Ecuadorian journalists are male, in their mid-thirties and hold a university degree in the communication or journalism fields. Of the 372 interviewed journalists from 144 media, 244 were men, 66.8 percent of the overall sample. On average, Ecuadorian journalists are 35.22 years old, although 69.5 percent are between 20 and 38 years old and only 17.4 percent are more than 45 years of age. Ecuadorian journalists are well educated because 66.3 percent have a Bachelor's degree, 11.3 percent a Master's and 2.5 percent a PhD. Only 1.4 percent of journalists do not have secondary studies. Furthermore, the large majority (85.5%) had specialized in journalism (35.3%), communication (18%) or both (32.2%).

The predominant ethnic group among journalists is mestizo (93.2%); almost two-thirds of them (63.2%) are Christian Roman Catholic, although 20.2 percent do not practice any religion; and 83.7 percent have a left-central political tendency. Finally, almost half of them (54.2%) earn between 400 and 1000 dollars a month and 18.7 percent less than 400 dollars a month (the minimum wage in Ecuador is 366 dollars).

Journalists in the Newsroom

More than two thirds of Ecuadorian journalists hold a full-time position (70.5%), whereas nearly a quarter (23.6%) of the respondents indicated that they have part-time employments, and 4.9 percent work as freelance journalist. Of those with full or part-time employment, 68.1 percent said they hold permanent positions, and 31.9 percent work on a temporary contract.

Journalism in Ecuador is a young profession due to the fact that journalists do not have much experience because, on average, they have worked for 10.04 years ($s=9.09$). Two thirds (67.2%) have less than 10 years of professional experience and only a fifth (21.7%) has worked between 10 and 20 years. More than half (55.9%) worked on various domains, news, sports and entertainment being the main topics and subjects. Three quarters of Ecuadorian journalists (80.6%) work for one newsroom; 32 percent of them have additional jobs outside the area of journalism. Only a minority of the interviewed journalists (22.1%) are members of a professional association.

Across the whole sample, 61.3 percent of the interviewees are working only in one news outlet and 38.7 percent indicated to work in various (between 2 and 7) platforms simultaneously. Regarding the type of media, the majority of Ecuadorian journalists in the sample work in the mainstream/conventional media. Concretely, most of them work for radio (36.8%), 33.2 percent for print media (21.6 percent for daily newspapers, 8.9 percent for weekly newspapers, and 2.7 percent for magazines), and 27.8 percent for television. Less than one fifth (17.3%) work for online media (5.1 percent for online newsrooms of traditional media, and 12.2 for stand-alone online news sites. Few journalists reported they work for news agencies (5.4%). Considering the ownership of media, two thirds (68.0%) of interviewees work in private media, 28.8 percent in public media, and 0.8 percent in governmental media. And, finally,

regarding the scope of media, almost half of all journalists (41.4%) work for national media, one third (34.9%) for local media, 15.1 percent for regional media and less than one-tenth (8.6%) for international media.

Journalistic Roles

With regard to professional role orientations, Ecuadorian journalists found it most important to provide analysis of current affairs, to report things as they are, to let people express their views, to educate the audience, to promote tolerance and cultural diversity, and to support national development (see Table 1). These results point to a hybridization of “classic” and “neutral” standard roles from Western journalism and other types of journalism more “engaged” with and “didactic” towards the citizen and government.

Likewise, journalists attribute little importance to being a detached observer, to supporting government policy, to providing entertainment and relaxation, to conveying a positive image of political leadership, and to being an adversary of the government. However, there was not a particularly strong consensus among the respondents, as the high standard deviations indicate. These results highlight that although we could speak of a passive role of journalists in Ecuador, the civic role exercised by them and the neglect of roles associated with market orientation and power distance are clearly present.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Provide analysis of current affairs	363	89.3	4.35	.84
Report things as they are	365	88.8	4.48	.91
Let people express their views	361	82.5	4.24	.98
Educate the audience	360	82.2	4.27	.91
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	359	82.2	4.28	.93
Support national development	358	81.0	4.16	1.04
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	357	73.7	4.01	1.07
Advocate for social change	363	76.3	4.04	1.10
Tell stories about the world	360	72.5	3.99	1.03
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	359	70.8	3.92	1.08
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	356	70.8	3.87	1.20
Provide information people need to make political decisions	359	67.1	3.82	1.21
Influence public opinion	361	62.9	3.66	1.21
Motivate people to participate in political activity	357	61.1	3.67	1.28
Set the political agenda	355	59.4	3.57	1.25
Monitor and scrutinize business	354	52.5	3.50	1.15
Be a detached observer	340	49.4	3.19	1.39
Support government policy	352	46.3	3.20	1.31
Provide entertainment and relaxation	345	40.9	2.87	1.46
Convey a positive image of political leadership	352	34.7	2.84	1.38
Be an adversary of the government	346	22.3	2.23	1.42

Question: Please tell me how important each of these things is in your work. 5 means you find them extremely important, 4 means very important, 3 means somewhat important, 2 means little importance, and 1 means unimportant.

Professional Ethics

Ecuadorian journalists demonstrated a strong commitment to professional standards of ethics. Almost unanimously (97.3%) they agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Almost half of them (48.6%) agreed with the idea that ethics in journalism is a matter of personal judgment. Only one-third thinks that it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it (36.6%) or that ethics in journalism depends on the specific situation.

Table 2: Ethical orientations of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "strongly" and "somewhat agree"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context	371	97.3	4.79	.58
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	368	48.6	3.05	1.53
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	364	45.3	2.93	1.56
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	364	36.5	2.60	1.57

Question: The following statements describe different approaches to journalism. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree. 5 means you strongly agree, 4 means somewhat agree, 3 means undecided, 2 means somewhat disagree, and 1 means strongly disagree.

With regard to the justification of controversial reporting methods, one fifth (22.6%) considers that using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors is always justified and almost half of them (42.6%) considers it is justified on occasion. Around one third believes that it is justified on occasion to use hidden microphones or cameras (39.4%), to pay people for confidential information (25.0%), and to use confidential business or government documents without authorization (30.7%) (see Table 3). For the interviewees, the less justifiable practices are to accept money from sources, to alter photographs, to alter or fabric quotes from sources, and to publish stories with unverified content.

Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists

	N	Percentage saying "always justified"	Percentage saying "justified on occasion"
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	359	22.6	42.6
Using hidden microphones or cameras	360	7.8	39.4
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	363	7.4	19.6
Publishing stories with unverified content	362	7.2	6.1
Paying people for confidential information	364	6.9	25.0
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	361	6.6	28.3
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	365	6.0	30.7
Claiming to be somebody else	365	6.0	25.2
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	361	5.3	6.6
Altering photographs	358	5.3	5.9
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	363	5.2	19.0
Accepting money from sources	361	5.0	6.9

Question: Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?

Professional Autonomy and Influences

Journalists in Ecuador reported a moderate degree of professional autonomy. Just over 50 percent affirmed to have complete or a great deal of freedom with respect to participating in editorial coordination activities (55.0%), the selection of stories (65.8%), and decisions about which aspects are emphasized in a news story (65.4%).

Table 4: Journalistic autonomy

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of autonomy"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Participate in editorial coordination	362	55.0	3.59	1.30
Selecting stories	366	65.8	3.86	1.02
Aspects emphasized	367	65.4	3.86	1.04

Question: Please tell me on a scale of 5 to 1 how much you personally autonomy each of the following institutions. 5 means you have complete freedom, 4 means you have a great deal of freedom, 3 means you have some freedom, 2 means you have little freedom, and 1 means you have no freedom at all.

Ecuadorian Journalists are influenced by a variety of context factors. The principal source of influences mentioned by the interviewees was "journalism ethics" (88.8%), which fared on top of the list (see Table 5). Likewise, a majority of journalists found their work substantively constrained by information access (or lack thereof) (77.3%), their personal values and beliefs (71.2%), media laws and regulation (65.8%), and feedback from the audience (64.3%). Also, more than half of the respondents admitted their work to be influenced by internal influences such as editorial policy, supervisors and higher editors, managers and owners of the news organizations.

Notwithstanding internal factors were found to be more influential than external constraints, journalists interviewed felt a considerable influence by sources from external context of the media, principally from laws, government and institutions of regulation. The journalists reported only minor influence from friends, acquaintances and family (26.2%), colleagues in other media (27.3%), and military, police and state security (28.9%). Likewise, economic influences – business people (27.6%), advertising considerations (31.6%), and profit expectations seem to have little relevance in Ecuadorian newsrooms (36.4%).

Table 5: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	366	88.8	4.47	.82
Information access	365	77.3	4.07	.96
Your personal values and beliefs	354	71.2	3.92	1.17
Media laws and regulation	357	65.8	3.81	.98
Feedback from the audience	367	64.3	3.76	.94
Editorial policy	361	62.0	3.67	1.14
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	356	58.1	3.63	1.02
Managers of the news organization	354	55.9	3.56	1.08
Owners of the news organization	353	53.8	3.55	1.21
Time limits	359	52.1	3.50	1.13
Availability of news-gathering resources	345	49.3	3.26	1.29
Censorship	359	47.4	3.32	1.21
Audience research and data	350	47.1	3.34	1.19
Relationships with news sources	361	45.7	3.17	1.30
Public relations	361	39.6	3.06	1.27
Government officials	359	37.6	2.98	1.29
Competing news organizations	362	37.0	3.11	1.12
Profit expectations	338	36.4	2.95	1.28
Your peers on the staff	361	36.3	2.98	1.18
Religious considerations	331	33.8	2.86	1.31
Politicians	359	32.9	2.86	1.31
Pressure groups	355	31.8	2.73	1.33
Advertising considerations	345	31.6	2.74	1.32
Military, police and state security	345	29.0	2.72	1.29
Business people	352	27.6	2.59	1.31
Colleagues in other media	363	27.3	2.74	1.24
Friends, acquaintances and family	363	26.2	2.68	1.30

Question: Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work. 5 means it is extremely influential, 4 means very influential, 3 means somewhat influential, 2 means little influential, and 1 means not influential.

Journalism in Transition

According to the surveyed journalists, journalism in Ecuador is currently in a state of change. The principal changes are related to the requirement of a university degree – in journalism or a related field – to practice the profession (95%), and the use of digital skills – such as the use of search engines (93.6%) – and the development of technical skills (81.3%) (see Table 6). The questions about changes in journalism were only presented to journalists who had five years or more of professional experience.

Table 6: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
Having a university degree	220	95.0	1.4
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	220	95.0	1.8
The use of search engines	218	93.6	2.3
Technical skills	219	81.3	4.1
The relevance of journalism for society	218	72.0	12.4
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	219	66.7	11.4
The credibility of journalism	219	66.7	20.1
Average working hours of journalists	216	54.2	9.7
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	217	43.3	35.0
Time available for researching stories	218	41.7	28.4

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in [country]. 5 means they have increased a lot, 4 means they have somewhat increased, 3 means there has been no change, 2 means they have somewhat decreased, and 1 means they have decreased a lot.

Influences on journalists have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 7. These and news production have changed in a positive way based on the professionalization of journalism – education (86.6%) and ethical standards (84.4%), increase of technical digital skills – social media (87.7%), and the strengthened influence of citizens – audience feedback (83.3%) and audience involvement in news production (81%). The influences that have least increased were profit making pressures (44.3%), advertising considerations (44.1%), and pressure toward sensational news (38.6%).

Table 7: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media, such as [Facebook, Twitter, etc.]	218	87.7	3.7
Journalism education	217	86.6	5.5
Ethical standards	218	84.4	5.9
Audience feedback	216	83.3	2.8
Audience involvement in news production	216	81.0	5.6
User-generated contents, such as blogs	215	73.5	8.8
Competition	215	68.4	9.3
Public relations	215	64.2	13.5
Audience research	214	63.6	14.0
Western ways of practicing journalism	204	50.0	12.7
Profit making pressures	210	44.3	24.3
Advertising considerations	211	44.1	22.7
Pressure toward sensational news	208	38.5	34.6

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in [country]. 5 means they have strengthened a lot, 4 means they have somewhat strengthened, 3 means they did not change, 2 means they have somewhat weakened, and 1 means they have weakened a lot.

Journalistic Trust

In general, Ecuadorian journalists have a low level of trust in public institutions. They have reasonable faith in news media (43.5%), however, and to some extent also in the military (30.5%) and the government (27.3%) (see Table 8). Other major political institutions – such as the parliament, the judiciary, and trade unions – were not considered particularly trustworthy. Ecuadorian journalists seem to have less trust in political parties (9.5%), and politicians in general (7.6%). The high standard deviations for trust in the government, parliament, and religious leaders show point to a polarization between the political and ideological ideas and behaviors among journalists in Ecuador.

Table 8: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying “complete” and “a great deal of trust”	Mean	Standard Deviation
The news media	368	43.5	3.38	.89
The military	368	30.4	3.00	1.04
The government	367	27.2	2.82	1.17
Religious leaders	367	25.9	2.73	1.15
The police	367	22.6	2.83	1.02
The parliament	367	19.3	2.57	1.17
The judiciary/the courts	368	17.6	2.61	1.03
Trade unions	366	13.7	2.55	.93
Political parties	369	9.5	2.21	.99
Politicians in general	366	7.7	2.18	.97

Question: Please tell me on a scale of 5 to 1 how much you personally trust each of the following institutions. 5 means you have complete trust, 4 means you have a great deal of trust, 3 means you have some trust, 2 means you have little trust, and 1 means you have no trust at all.

Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	17,000 working journalists (estimated by CORDICOM)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	simple random sampling, purposive quota sampling and convenience sampling for newsrooms and simple random sampling and convenience sampling for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	372 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face-to-face, mail/e-mail and online
<i>Response rate:</i>	14%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	12/2014-06/2015