

Country Report

Journalists in Spain

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The Spanish journalist is usually male, in his late thirties and holds a university degree in the specific fields of journalism or communication. A total of 390 journalists were interviewed, of which 160 were women, i.e. 41.0 percent of the overall sample. The average age of Spanish journalists was 39.23 years ($s=9.17$), and half of them were younger than 38. On the whole, respondents have higher education studies: 96.7 percent hold a university or college degree. Most professionals in this category (91.7%) have specialized in communication and/or journalism.

Journalists in the Newsroom

Most Spanish journalists interviewed held a full-time position (85.6%), while 5.1 percent of them were in part-time employment and 9.2 percent developed their professional career as freelancers. Of those with full or part-time employment, 89.7 percent had permanent positions, and 10.3 percent worked on a temporary contract.

The professional experience of journalists in Spain is relatively high. On average, they had worked as journalists for 15.91 years ($s=8.91$), and about half of them had more than 15 years of professional practice. Most journalists worked on various topics and subjects (67.2%); whereas the remaining 32.8 percent of respondents indicated that they belonged to a specific desk (such as politics, local news or sports). In general, Spanish journalists worked for 1.31 newsrooms ($s=0.76$); and 12.8 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. On the other hand, 41.1 percent of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association.

The majority of Spanish journalists in the sample worked for print media: 40.3 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 0.8 percent to weekly newspapers, and 3.6 percent to magazines. A further 17.9 percent of journalists worked for private or public service television, and 11.8 percent for private or public radio. Few journalists in the sample reported working for news agencies (2.8%), but the proportion of professionals who worked for stand-alone online news sites is also high (22.8%).

Journalistic Roles

When it comes to journalistic roles, Spanish professionals believe that the most important tasks are: to report things as they are, promote tolerance and cultural diversity, let people express their views, and provide analysis of current affairs (see Table 1). If we observe the percentages and average values, the significance that these roles have among the journalists interviewed is very clear. Moreover, the standard deviations indicate homogeneity in their criteria. Similarly, there was a strong consensus among the respondents over the irrelevance of conveying a positive image of political leadership and supporting government policy, activities considered of little importance.

On the other hand, a large proportion of journalists in Spain found it valuable to tell stories about the world, monitor and scrutinize political leaders and businesses, provide information people need to make political decisions, be detached observers, advocate for social change, and motivate people to participate in political activities. Most of these roles are related to political issues. However, other political aspects, such as acting as government opponents and setting the political agenda, were supported only by a minority of respondents.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	390	96.9	4.79	.55
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	386	89.9	4.52	.76
Let people express their views	389	88.4	4.46	.76
Provide analysis of current affairs	389	87.9	4.38	.76
Tell stories about the world	385	82.6	4.24	.90
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	385	79.2	4.17	1.04
Monitor and scrutinize business	386	77.7	4.14	1.08
Provide information people need to make political decisions	387	72.4	3.97	1.09
Be a detached observer	390	70.3	3.92	1.00
Advocate for social change	387	69.5	3.90	1.04
Motivate people to participate in political activity	389	60.9	3.71	1.04
Support national development	385	56.1	3.60	1.17
Influence public opinion	387	52.2	3.50	1.09
Educate the audience	385	46.2	3.35	1.19
Provide entertainment and relaxation	388	40.7	3.13	1.15
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	387	38.0	3.12	1.12
Set the political agenda	387	37.0	3.13	1.13
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	389	33.4	2.95	1.20
Be an adversary of the government	381	18.1	2.45	1.20
Support government policy	382	9.4	2.15	1.05
Convey a positive image of political leadership	386	3.4	1.85	.92

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

Spanish journalists generally maintain the ethical commitments required for the exercise of their profession. In this sense, the respondents almost unanimously agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of the situation and context (see Table 2). Furthermore, just a small proportion of journalists considered that their ethical decisions are a matter of personal judgment and that sometimes it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it. In contrast, three out of ten of the interviewees endorsed the fact that journalists' ethical decisions depend on the specific situation.

The justification of controversial reporting methods by Spanish journalists is the following. A large majority of them found the use of confidential business or government documents without authorization, as well as re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors, justifiable at least on occasion (see Table 3). Also, around half of the journalists indicated it was tolerable to be employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information, claim to be somebody else, exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story, and use hidden microphones or cameras. Nevertheless, only a minority of journalists in Spain considered it acceptable to publish stories with unverified contents, to accept money from sources, or to alter photographs or quotes from sources.

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	390	87.7	4.39	.83
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	388	32.2	2.58	1.37
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	390	16.4	2.17	1.18
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	390	15.1	2.14	1.15

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.

Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists

	N	Percentage saying “always justified”	Percentage saying “justified on occasion”
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	390	26.4	55.4
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	385	8.8	31.9
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	389	8.7	43.4
Claiming to be somebody else	389	8.5	38.3
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	389	7.7	35.0
Using hidden microphones or cameras	390	6.9	47.9
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	389	3.1	31.9
Paying people for confidential information	390	2.6	37.2
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	388	.5	7.0
Altering photographs	389	.3	7.5
Accepting money from sources	390	.3	2.1
Publishing stories with unverified content	390	.3	1.8

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

In Spain, journalists confirmed that they have a high degree of professional autonomy. Three out of four respondents (75.3%) said that they had total or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. With a total of 80.3 percent, the number of journalists who had total or a great deal of freedom in deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story was even higher. Regarding the participation in editorial and newsroom coordination (such as attending editorial meetings or assigning reporters), 51.0 percent of respondents reported that they participated in these activities “always” or “very often”.

Spanish journalists are influenced by several factors when they produce news (see Table 4). Of all the potential factors, “journalism ethics” appeared top of the list, as nine out of ten professionals reported to be extremely or very influenced by this. A large number of respondents found their work substantively constrained by information access, time limits, and by editorial supervisors and higher editors. Also, more than half of the journalists admitted that their activity was influenced by their personal values and beliefs, the editorial policy, the availability of news-gathering resources, and by relationships with news sources.

In general, internal factors appeared to be more influential than external pressures. Thus, Spanish journalists felt little influenced by other factors such as government

officials, religious considerations, colleagues in other media, or friends, acquaintances and family; four factors which may be considered quite heterogeneous. Finally, they also reported only minor influence from the military, police and state security, censorship and pressure groups; factors which are typical of countries with low democratic levels.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	390	89.5	4.39	.79
Information access	388	77.1	4.03	.89
Time limits	389	73.5	3.94	1.01
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	381	64.6	3.75	.96
Your personal values and beliefs	390	59.2	3.64	1.08
Editorial policy	383	57.4	3.54	1.11
Availability of news-gathering resources	385	56.1	3.60	1.13
Relationships with news sources	388	55.2	3.60	.99
Managers of the news organization	379	43.5	3.19	1.33
Owners of the news organization	375	43.2	3.10	1.45
Advertising considerations	363	36.6	2.93	1.30
Profit expectations	374	32.9	2.84	1.21
Your peers on the staff	388	32.7	3.06	.98
Audience research and data	377	31.6	2.83	1.17
Media laws and regulation	378	30.2	2.93	1.17
Feedback from the audience	388	28.9	2.96	.98
Competing news organizations	387	26.9	2.87	1.05
Business people	389	19.5	2.37	1.16
Politicians	389	19.3	2.42	1.21
Public relations	388	13.9	2.31	1.07
Pressure groups	388	13.7	2.22	1.13
Censorship	388	13.7	2.10	1.20
Military, police and state security	386	13.7	2.09	1.15
Friends, acquaintances and family	390	11.0	2.08	1.09
Colleagues in other media	389	9.0	2.13	.97
Religious considerations	380	8.2	1.85	1.08
Government officials	389	8.0	1.90	1.02

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

Journalism is currently undergoing a process of change. According to the opinion of Spanish professionals, the use of search engines and the relevance of technical skills have changed significantly over the last five years (see Table 5). Overall, journalists’ responses point to a substantive deterioration in the working conditions of the profession, particularly due to an increase in the average working hours. Additionally, most respondents thought that journalism’s public credibility has decreased, as well as their professional freedom to make editorial decisions.

As the results show, influences on journalism and news production have changed. With the exception of ethical standards, journalism education, western ways of practicing journalism and public relations, influences on Spanish professionals have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6. In this regard, special attention should be paid to the influence of social media (such as Facebook or Twitter), user-generated contents (such as blogs), and audience feedback, which has become very strong over the past five years. A majority of Spanish journalists described an increase of audience involvement in news production, pressure toward sensational news and

audience research. As said before, ethical standards were the only source of influence that has essentially weakened over the years.

The questions about changes in journalism were only presented to journalists who had five or more years of professional experience.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
The use of search engines	348	94.0	.3
Technical skills	348	87.4	2.6
Average working hours of journalists	347	82.4	4.3
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	345	76.5	9.6
Having a university degree	348	40.5	15.8
The relevance of journalism for society	347	32.3	34.3
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	348	31.3	24.1
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	346	11.8	55.5
The credibility of journalism	348	10.6	66.1
Time available for researching stories	348	3.4	86.2

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Spain. 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.

Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter	348	96.3	1.1
User-generated contents, such as blogs	348	85.9	3.4
Audience feedback	346	80.1	4.3
Audience involvement in news production	346	71.7	6.9
Pressure toward sensational news	348	69.3	6.6
Audience research	342	68.4	5.3
Profit making pressures	338	63.3	14.8
Competition	347	61.7	13.5
Advertising considerations	332	59.6	22.0
Public relations	342	40.4	14.9
Western ways of practicing journalism	328	30.8	13.1
Journalism education	336	24.7	46.7
Ethical standards	347	10.4	63.7

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in Spain. 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

On the whole, Spanish journalists don't have much trust in public institutions. As shown in table 7, respondents don't have much faith in any of the ten organisms considered in the interview. Still, the three most valued institutions were the police, news media and the military. On the other hand, political organizations – such as political parties, politicians in general, and the government – and religious leaders were generally found untrustworthy by Spanish journalists, and a strong consensus among them was established due to low standard deviation values.

Remarkably, Spanish journalists don't have much trust in certain prestigious institutions such as the judiciary or the courts, parliament or trade unions. Thus, the interviewed professionals had relatively little confidence in these three institutions that have a traditional presence in democracy.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The police	388	46.6	3.31	1.02
The news media	388	42.8	3.32	.76
The military	387	39.8	3.03	1.17
The judiciary/the courts	386	31.1	2.96	.93
The parliament	389	23.1	2.81	1.01
Trade unions	389	9.0	2.32	.94
The government	389	9.0	2.24	.96
Religious leaders	388	6.4	2.02	.98
Politicians in general	388	3.6	2.11	.80
Political parties	389	2.1	1.98	.80

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>	18,000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	stratified proportionally random sampling for newsrooms and convenience sample for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	390 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face-to-face and mail/e-mail
<i>Response rate:</i>	82.3%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	07/2013-04/2015