

Country Report

Journalists in Mexico

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Mexico is male, in his late thirties and primarily holds a university degree in the field of media, communications or journalism. Of the 377 interviewed journalists, a little less than a third ($n=120$) were female, making for a proportion of 31.8 percent of the overall sample. On average, Mexican journalists were 38.41 years old ($s=10.38$), with 50% being 37 years old or younger. In fact, nearly a fourth (26.0%) of the respondents were between 21 and 30 years old. Journalists in Mexico tend to be university-educated: 75.1 percent of the respondents hold a Bachelor degree, while 4.5 percent undertook some university studies but did not complete them. Another 11.4 percent hold a postgraduate degree, mostly at the Masters level. Of those respondents who held a university degree, the majority (68.4%) specialized either in journalism, another communication field, or both, but 31.7 percent had specialized in a different field.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Mexico held a full-time position (83.5%), whereas 10.4 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 5.6 percent worked as freelance journalists. More than half of Mexican journalists are fairly experienced: 18.0 percent have less than five years of experience, 26.3 percent between five and ten years and 55.2 percent more than ten years of experience. Only around one fifth of journalists in Mexico are specialized and work for a specific beat/desk (21.5%), whereas the vast majority (78.5%) work on various beats and topics.

On the whole, Mexican journalists worked on average for 2.21 different newsrooms ($s=1.10$); and 34.8 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. The majority of the interviewed journalists are not members of a professional association (74.8%) and only a fourth (25.2%) did belong to one or more professional associations.

Across the whole sample, Mexican journalists are still predominantly mono-platform as nearly two thirds (58.1%) work for a single platform or outlet, while the rest is multimedia and work for two or different platforms.

The majority of Mexican journalists in the sample worked for electronic media organizations: 43.2 percent work for radio news organizations, 34.5 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 8.0 percent to weeklies or magazines, 9.5 percent worked for TV networks and 4.8 percent for online media. Most journalists work predominantly for private-media (87.5%) while the rest work for state-managed or public media.

Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, the vast majority of journalists in Mexico found it extremely or very important to report things as they are, followed in second place by the role of promoting tolerance and cultural diversity, and the role of advocating for social change in third place. The fourth role to which Mexican journalist gave top importance in a most (5) to least (1) scale was to let people express their views, followed by the role of monitoring and scrutinizing political leaders in fifth place (see Table 1).

The top roles show a rich mixture of adherence: from the classic Western roles of dissemination (reporting things as they are), to the roles more associated with mobilization and promotion of positive social outcomes (promoting tolerance or advocating for social change), followed by democratic roles such as serving as forum (let people express their views) and the watchdog function of the press (monitoring political leaders).

There appears to be greater consensus around the ten most-popular roles, as shown by the relatively lower standard deviations, than in the bottom ten roles. This indicates the journalists who support those roles are unusual and the values they represent are a point of contention within the corps of journalists. For example, the least prioritized role was to convey a positive image of political leaders which however had a fairly high standard deviation, followed by the role of being an adversary to the government, which ranked in penultimate place in order of priority and had the second highest standard deviation of them all. This suggests some journalists consider both roles very important while others do not at all. The support of government policy was also the third least prioritized role, followed by that of providing entertainment and relaxation in fourth place and by the role of being a detached observer of events in fifth place of low priority, but which had the highest standard deviation of them all, suggesting very little agreement on how distant should journalists be from the stories they report on.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	376	95.5	4.69	.65
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	377	92.8	4.55	.78
Advocate for social change	377	89.7	4.50	.84
Let people express their views	376	88.8	4.50	.81
Monitor and scrutinize political leader	374	86.9	4.33	.90
Provide analysis of current affairs	377	86.5	4.35	.90
Provide information people need to make political decisions	375	84.3	4.37	.88
Support national development	375	82.7	4.29	.96
Influence public opinion	375	80.5	4.21	1.05
Tell stories about the world	376	75.5	4.07	.96
Educate the audience	376	75.3	4.05	1.07
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	376	74.2	4.09	1.14
Set the political agenda	375	70.7	3.90	1.08
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	376	63.8	3.71	1.19
Motivate people to participate in political activity	375	62.9	3.71	1.22
Monitor and scrutinize business	374	60.2	3.72	1.11
Be a detached observer	375	58.4	3.47	1.29
Provide entertainment and relaxation	375	47.5	3.29	1.25
Support government policy	372	35.8	3.07	1.21
Be an adversary of the government	370	21.1	2.40	1.26
Convey a positive image of political leadership	371	14.8	2.31	1.19

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

Mexican journalists generally demonstrated a strong commitment to professional standards of ethics. The respondents almost unanimously agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). However, when broken into more specific stances, the responses were less consensual. Nearly 6 out of 10 interviewees agreed or strongly agreed with the view that what is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation, whereas a little less than half agreed that their ethical decisions are a matter of personal judgment and nearly 4 in 10 agreed that sometimes it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it. However, the high standard deviations suggest that there is considerable variation in level of agreement about these views.

The picture was mixed with regards to a selected number of potentially controversial reporting techniques. Less than half of journalists in Mexico think that using confidential business and government documents without authorization or using hidden microphones and cameras is justified at least on occasion. Around three journalists out of ten also think that on occasion, getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information, using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors and claiming to be somebody else could be justified. However, there is nearly no controversial reporting method that journalists feel that is always justified.

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	376	96.0	4.73	.58
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	374	59.4	3.36	1.44
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	376	44.9	3.00	1.50
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	375	39.2	2.93	1.46

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	376	16.8	41.8
Using hidden microphones or cameras	376	13.3	46.3
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	376	12.5	30.3
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	375	11.2	30.4
Claiming to be somebody else	377	8.2	33.2
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	374	5.6	16.0
Publishing stories with unverified content	377	3.7	4.2
Paying people for confidential information	375	3.5	25.6
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	375	2.9	19.2
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	376	2.7	3.7
Accepting money from sources	376	2.4	3.5
Altering photographs	377	2.1	2.9

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?

Three practices: “altering or fabricating quotes from sources”, “accepting money from sources” and “altering photographs” were almost unanimously condemned by Mexican journalists.

Professional Autonomy and Influences

Journalists in Mexico reported a fairly high degree of professional autonomy when conceptualized as autonomy within the news organization. Around three out of four respondents (75.6%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories and complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized (76.1%). However, fewer journalists (56.6%) said that they participate in editorial and newsroom coordination, such as attending editorial meetings or assigning reporters “always” or “very often”.

News production is influenced by a variety of factors which also vary across newsrooms, as the high standard deviations for most influence factors show (See Table 4). Among the biggest potential sources of influences, “journalism ethics” ranked at the top of the list for Mexican respondents (see Table 4). A majority of journalists found their work substantively influenced by the level of information access, by editorial policies and by feedback from the audience. It is worth noting how hierarchical relations also play a significant role in news making, as editorial supervisors, media owners and the managers of the news organizations were considered extremely or very influential by more than 6 out of 10 journalists in Mexico.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	376	93.4	4.54	.76
Information access	374	77.3	3.97	.99
Editorial policy	371	74.4	3.95	1.02
Feedback from the audience	375	69.1	3.89	.98
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	368	64.7	3.73	1.12
The owners of news organization	367	63.8	3.72	1.30
The managers of news organization	366	62.6	3.70	1.25
Time limits	367	57.8	3.56	1.16
Relationships with news sources	371	55.8	3.49	1.21
Media laws and regulation	366	53.6	3.41	1.19
Personal values and beliefs	330	52.7	3.45	1.38
Availability of news-gathering resources	352	44.0	3.12	1.28
Audience research and data	348	43.7	3.18	1.23
Censorship	354	41.0	3.03	1.42
Profit expectations	354	37.3	2.90	1.36
Public relations	369	33.3	2.95	1.23
Competing news organizations	367	33.0	2.91	1.14
Peers on the staff	355	29.3	2.72	1.20
The military, police and state security	350	27.4	2.63	1.28
Advertising considerations	354	26.8	2.64	1.32
Government officials	359	23.1	2.51	1.28
Politicians	359	22.8	2.52	1.28
Pressure Groups	359	22.8	2.68	1.14
Colleagues in other media	360	17.5	2.38	1.14
Business people	360	16.7	2.38	1.17
Friends, acquaintances and family	345	15.9	2.19	1.19
Religious considerations	332	13.9	2.14	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. 5 means it is extremely influential, 4 means very influential, 3 means somewhat influential, 2 means little influential, and 1 means not influential.

In the bottom half of the table, censorship shows the highest level of standard deviation suggesting low agreement on how influential this is for journalists' work (low for some and very high for others). However, four out of ten journalists said censorship is very or extremely influential. Some professional reference groups inside and outside the newsroom are important for around 3 in 10 people, such as: public relations, competing news organizations or peers on the staff. Between two to three out of ten journalists in Mexico consider that state actors such as the military and security forces, government officials, politicians or pressure groups were very or extremely influential, with high levels of standard deviation, also suggesting that their influence varies across the country. Personal aspects such as friends and family, as well as religious considerations, were the least influential factor for journalists in Mexico.

Journalism in Transition

Journalism is currently in a state of change. According to Mexican journalists, the use of search engines and the importance of technical skills had most profoundly changed over the last five years (see Table 5). A large majority of respondents reported an increase in the importance of having a university degree, while at the same time they also reported an increase in their average working hours. Somewhat surprisingly, nearly six in ten respondents in Mexico believe the credibility of journalists has increased, as well as their professional freedom and the time available for researching stories. In the other side of the spectrum, around one fifth of respondents believe that the credibility of journalism and their freedom to make editorial decisions has decreased, whereas nearly a third (31.9%) report a decrease of time available to research stories.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
The use of search engines	305	95.1	1.3
The importance of technical skills	306	84.3	2.9
The importance of having a university degree	306	78.8	7.2
Average working hours of journalists	305	74.8	5.9
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	306	68.3	8.5
The relevance of journalism for society	304	66.1	13.5
The importance of having a degree in journalism or a related field	306	64.7	10.8
The credibility of journalism	305	56.7	20.3
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	306	53.6	19.9
Time available for researching stories	305	42.6	31.8

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Mexico. 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 journalism and news production have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6, including the importance of journalism education and ethical standards. At the top of these aspects —also displaying the lowest levels of disagreement— are those factors related to digital and technological change. The vast majority of respondents believe there has been an increase in the influence of social media, audience feedback, audience involvement in news production and user-generated content. In the bottom of the table, but perceived as increasingly important for more than half of journalists in Mexico, are market-related factors, such as audience research, advertising considerations, profit-making pressures and pressure towards sensational news. In contrast, according to journalists, the three aspects

whose influence has weakened the most are ethical standards (21.6%), pressure towards sensational news (19.5%) and journalism education (17.3%).

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

Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media such as Facebook or Twitter	305	91.5	2.3
Audience feedback	306	85.0	2.3
Audience involvement in news production	305	77.4	3.3
User-generated contents, such as blogs	303	74.3	5.0
Competition	305	73.1	6.9
Journalism education	306	69.3	17.3
Ethical standards	305	58.4	21.6
Public relations	303	56.4	7.9
Audience Research	301	56.1	13.0
Advertising considerations	303	54.5	14.2
Profit making pressures	302	54.0	12.9
Pressure toward sensational news	303	51.2	19.5

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

Trust in Institutions

When it comes to institutional trust, journalists in Mexico turned out to have little faith in all the listed institutions (see Table 7). The most trusted institution was the news media, with four in ten giving them their complete or great deal of trust, which is still relatively low. However, less than three journalists out of ten trust any State-related institution, with the military reaching this relatively higher level than the Congress or the government as a whole, which scored slightly above one in ten journalists trusting them. Religious leaders found themselves slightly less trusted than those two institutions. Those institutions—Military, the Congress, the government and religious leaders—also scored the highest level of disagreement in their level of trust, indicating a higher variation across the country.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The news media	371	39.6	3.31	.85
The military	372	29.3	2.85	1.15
The parliament (the Congress)	374	15.0	2.56	1.03
The government	373	13.4	2.45	1.01
Religious leaders	374	12.0	2.38	1.05
The judiciary/the courts	373	9.9	2.23	1.00
The police	373	5.9	1.93	.94
Trade unions	373	5.1	1.97	.94
Politicians in general	372	3.8	1.93	.86
Political parties	372	3.0	1.83	.84

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.

In the bottom half of the table, we find key institutions in charge of dispensing justice and security, such as the judiciary and the police, trade unions, politicians in general,



and political parties at the very bottom. Less than ten percent of the respondents trust the judiciary system, less than six percent the police, around 5 percent the trade unions and less than 4 percent give their full trust to politicians or political parties. The lower standard deviations suggest greater consensus on the level of mistrust of political parties, politicians in general, trade unions and the police, suggesting this is a widespread issue.

Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	18,400 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	stratified proportionally random sampling for newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	377 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face-to-face and telephone
<i>Response rate:</i>	57%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	01/2013-03/2015