

## Country Report

# Journalists in Serbia

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## Backgrounds of Journalists

An average journalist in Serbia is somewhat more likely to be a woman than a man, in her early forties, and holds a university diploma or higher, with specialization in journalism or communication. Slightly over half of the interviewed journalists – 214, or 53.8 percent – were women. On average, journalists in Serbia were 40.92 years of age, ranging from 21 to 74 years ( $s=10.47$ ); 59.3 percent were younger than the average, while 52.2 percent were younger than the median age of 40 years. They were well educated: 59.7 percent held a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, 16.6 percent had some university studies but no degree, 14.9 percent had completed high school, 7.9 percent had a Master's degree or equivalent, and 1 percent had a PhD. Of those respondents who held a university degree or higher, more than half specialized in journalism, communications or both (41.2%, 7.4% and 8.5% respectively).

## Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Serbia held a full-time position (91.2%), whereas 6.1 percent were freelancers, and 2.5 percent had part-time jobs. Of those with full or part-time employment, 80.9 percent said they held permanent positions, and 19.1 percent worked on temporary contracts.

Professional experience spans across 54 years, with an average of 15.99 years in journalism ( $s=9.64$ ). Slightly more than half of the respondents (56%) are less experienced than the average, while the vast majority (86.3%) had less than 27 years of professional experience. Journalists are predominantly generalists, with 64.6 percent covering various topics and subjects, and around one third reporting on a specific beat (35.4%). Journalists in Serbia on the whole worked in an average of 1.30 newsrooms ( $s=0.68$ ), and 17.9 percent held additional paid jobs outside of journalism. Less than half (43.0%) said they were members of professional associations.

Most of the interviewed journalists worked for print media: daily newspaper (24.1%), weekly newspaper (8.1%), or magazine (4.7%). Nearly one-third (31.7%) contributed to television, 15.5 percent to radio, and 7.1 percent to a news agency. As for online media, 0.7 percent worked for a stand-alone online outlet, and 8.1 percent for an online outlet of a traditional media.

## Journalistic Roles

Journalists in Serbia seriously believe in their role to inform, interpret, educate and advocate for social change. Nearly all of them, with very little divergence, say the main role of journalism is to report things as they are, followed by providing analysis, promoting tolerance and diversity, educating the audience, letting people

express their views, advocating for social change, influencing public opinion, supporting national development and telling stories about the world.

Around two thirds point to aspects of the watchdog-role as important in their work: monitoring and scrutinizing political leaders and businesses and providing information people need to make political decisions, as well as being a detached observer.

Slightly more than half of the interviewed journalists believe it is their job to provide advice for daily life, and there is a relative agreement among them about this. Less popular journalistic roles of setting the political agenda and motivating people to take part in political activity enjoy support of 43.1 and 37.5 percent respectively, with a higher divergence of opinions.

Similarly, the disagreement is relatively high over prioritizing entertainment and relaxation, or being an adversary of the government, each upheld by one third of respondents. Supporting government’s policy and conveying a positive image of political leadership are the two least popular journalistic roles (8.9 and 12.6 percent respectively), and journalists tend to agree about this.

*Table 1: Roles of journalists*

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	405	97.0	4.79	.54
Provide analysis of current affairs	404	90.1	4.53	.79
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	403	89.6	4.56	.81
Educate the audience	403	86.6	4.47	.88
Let people express their views	401	80.8	4.27	.98
Advocate for social change	403	76.9	4.13	1.08
Support national development	399	75.4	4.18	1.16
Influence public opinion	399	74.2	4.10	1.04
Tell stories about the world	404	70.8	3.96	1.02
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	402	69.9	3.93	1.20
Monitor and scrutinize business	398	69.3	3.87	1.20
Provide information people need to make political decisions	398	65.8	3.79	1.30
Be a detached observer	391	65.7	3.79	1.26
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	399	58.9	3.69	1.18
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	403	49.1	3.47	1.28
Set the political agenda	392	43.1	3.14	1.41
Motivate people to participate in political activity	400	37.5	3.06	1.33
Provide entertainment and relaxation	401	36.4	3.09	1.30
Be an adversary of the government	392	32.7	2.89	1.36
Convey a positive image of political leadership	398	12.6	2.00	1.22
Support government policy	395	8.9	1.91	1.09

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

Nearly 95 percent of the interviewed journalists agree that journalists should always adhere to their professional code of ethics. Approximately one third of respondents are more prone to situational ethics and personal judgment, with relatively high disagreement over these issues. Only 13.3 percent said it was acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it, and they appear not to disagree much.

When it comes to reporting methods, the majority of these journalists, or nearly two thirds, believes unauthorized use of confidential governmental or business material is justified. Half of the respondents said working undercover or getting information

is a legitimate reporting method. Just below half justify the use of hidden cameras and microphones, followed by those who believe it is acceptable to pay people to obtain information. Exerting pressure on unwilling informants, as well as re-creating or dramatizing, is justified for just above one third of the interviewed journalists.

Altering photographs, using personal documents, publishing unverified content, and accepting money to publish are among the least ethical reporting techniques, ranking below 20 percent of support. And finally, fabricating quotes from sources is considered a justified reporting technique by five percent of respondents.

*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	406	94.8	4.67	.76
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	400	34.8	2.62	1.43
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	401	28.9	2.41	1.40
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	400	13.3	1.93	1.21

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	391	10.7	52.2
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	400	8.8	35.3
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	397	8.6	41.3
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	387	6.5	32.6
Using hidden microphones or cameras	394	5.8	42.4
Paying people for confidential information	387	5.4	42.1
Claiming to be somebody else	399	3.0	33.3
Altering photographs	402	1.7	16.2
Accepting money from sources	402	1.2	4.0
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	402	1.0	15.4
Publishing stories with unverified content	405	1.0	10.9
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	405	1.0	4.0

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

Just above two-thirds of journalists interviewed in Serbia said they have a great deal of freedom (42.4%), or complete freedom (25.6%) in selecting stories they work on, as well as on deciding on which aspect to emphasize (39.5% and 33.5% respectively), while to a lesser extent, they participate in newsroom coordination (56.0%) or assign reporters.

When it comes to perceived influences on their work, journalist most strongly disagree over two factors that they rank among the bottom third: the role of censorship and whether religious considerations affect their work. Professional ethics is by far the strongest influence for nearly 90 percent of journalists, who also

recognize personal values, access to information and editorial policy as very important. Journalists, however, do not perceive politicians, government, military and security services, or businessmen and pressure groups as influential on their work.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	401	87.3	4.39	.93
Your personal values and beliefs	391	69.3	3.99	1.15
Information access	403	65.8	3.76	1.13
Editorial policy	395	62.5	3.68	1.09
Media laws and regulation	404	59.7	3.65	1.11
Time limits	394	57.1	3.56	1.10
Availability of news-gathering resources	378	52.4	3.47	1.13
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	396	45.2	3.42	1.00
Audience research and data	375	43.2	3.21	1.20
Managers of the news organization	386	37.3	3.20	1.14
Owners of the news organization	362	35.4	3.11	1.22
Feedback from the audience	405	33.8	3.01	1.17
Your peers on the staff	387	32.0	3.11	1.03
Relationships with news sources	404	31.7	2.91	1.21
Profit expectations	360	30.8	2.84	1.27
Religious considerations	344	30.2	2.72	1.37
Censorship	400	25.5	2.64	1.31
Advertising considerations	358	23.2	2.75	1.17
Competing news organizations	403	21.3	2.64	1.16
Public relations	402	19.9	2.53	1.19
Friends, acquaintances and family	405	17.0	2.41	1.20
Politicians	402	16.7	2.27	1.23
Government officials	404	16.6	2.27	1.23
Colleagues in other media	406	13.5	2.44	1.07
Military, police and state security	401	11.0	1.92	1.15
Business people	403	10.9	2.07	1.11
Pressure groups	399	9.8	1.88	1.11

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

Some aspects of journalistic work have changed profoundly in recent years. Among them, nearly all journalists (94.6%) agree, is the increase in the use of search engines, followed by the need for technical skills, and long working hours. In the same period, however, credibility of journalism had decreased, according to two-thirds of the journalists, as has the time available for researching stories. There is virtually no aspect that has remained the same: Most aspects are perceived as having decreased to a greater or lesser extent: relevance of journalism for the society, the importance of having a university degree and a degree in journalism, and journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions.

The questions about changes in journalism were only presented to journalists who had five years 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	354	94.6	1.7
Technical skills	352	82.1	8.2
Average working hours of journalists	350	67.1	4.6
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	348	43.4	23.9
The relevance of journalism for society	352	25.0	45.4
Having a university degree	349	24.4	36.1
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	348	21.0	37.4
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	345	20.3	44.6
The credibility of journalism	351	16.2	66.7
Time available for researching stories	349	11.7	58.5

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Serbia. 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	355	88.5	4.2
Profit making pressures	351	83.8	4.0
Pressure toward sensational news	352	81.0	6.3
Advertising considerations	351	79.5	7.1
User-generated contents, such as blogs	348	72.4	9.2
Public relations	351	66.4	5.1
Competition	354	65.8	13.0
Audience feedback	352	61.6	9.4
Audience involvement in news production	351	58.7	10.5
Audience research	345	57.7	10.1
Western ways of practicing journalism	346	56.4	18.5
Journalism education	353	28.6	47.0
Ethical standards	352	15.6	66.2

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

Journalists in Serbia have generally little trust in political institutions, with the military topping the list by scoring a mean of 2.69 (on 1-5 scale), and trust of just over one-fifth of respondents. It is followed by news media, the police, and religious leaders, while the least trust is extended to political parties and politicians in general, trade unions and judiciary. The Government and Parliament are in the middle of the list. There appears to be no significant disagreement over these rankings.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying “complete” and “a great deal of trust”	Mean	Standard Deviation
The military	392	21.7	2.69	1.09
The news media	398	14.1	2.65	.89
The police	393	11.5	2.40	1.00
Religious leaders	394	10.7	2.06	1.08
The parliament [National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia]	393	9.2	2.26	.95
The government [Government of the Republic of Serbia]	393	6.9	2.17	.92
The judiciary/the courts	396	6.1	2.08	.93
Trade unions	396	6.1	1.93	.96
Political parties	395	2.8	1.69	.83
Politicians in general	396	2.8	1.65	.81

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>	8000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	purposive quota sampling for newsrooms and purposively chosen based on quota & convenience for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	407 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	telephone, face-to-face, mail/e-mail and online
<i>Response rate:</i>	51%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	01/2014-03/2014