



Country Report

Journalists in Latvia

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10 December, 2016

Backgrounds of Journalists

Journalism in Latvia historically is a female-dominated occupation and the Worlds of Journalism study approves it. The typical journalist in Latvia is female, in her late-thirties who holds rather a bachelor's or master's degree in journalism and/or any other communication field. Of the 340 interviewed journalists, 246 were women, making for a proportion of 72.4 percent of the overall sample. On average, Latvian journalists were 40.27 years old ($s=11.08$). More than half of the journalists were younger than 40 years, most between age 27 and 38.

Latvian journalists tend to be well educated: 41.2 percent of the respondents held a college or bachelor's degree and 37.9 percent held a master's degree. Another 1.2 percent of the journalists had obtained a doctoral degree, and 14.6 percent had undertaken some university studies, but never completed their studies or were still active students. A slight majority (58.5%) of respondents had obtained education with specialization in journalism and/or any other communication field.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Latvia held a full-time position (87.1%), whereas 4.4 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 8.2 percent worked as freelance-journalist. Of those with full or part-time employment, 92.2 percent said they held permanent positions, and 7.8 percent worked on a temporary contract.

Latvian journalists are fairly experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 16.29 years ($s=8.93$). A significant majority (72.4%) of them had worked in newsrooms less than 20 years, while 27.6 percent had more than 20 years of professional experience in media organizations. Most Latvian journalists worked on various topics and subjects (74.7%), while only 25.3 percent worked on a specific desk, such as economics, politics, health or else.

On the whole, Latvian journalists worked for 1.27 newsrooms ($s=.57$). While 78.5 percent of respondents worked for only one newsroom, the rest had worked for two or more newsrooms; 17.4 percent of interviewees also had additional jobs outside the area of journalism.

A significant majority (73.8%) of interviewed journalists were working for purely private media organizations, while 21.8 percent were public media employees. Inessential is a proportion of journalists working for purely state owned media outlets or media organizations with mixed ownership (altogether only 4.5%). Most journalists (64.1%) worked for media with a national reach, while 21.5 percent worked for regional media, and 7.4 percent worked for local media outlets. 7.1 percent of respondents were employed in transnational media organizations.

Journalists are mainly working for certain type of media. Only about 15.0 percent of respondents worked for various media types and could be described as multimedia journalists. A little bit more than half of interviewed journalists were affiliated with

print media: 33.2 percent worked for daily newspapers, 7.1 percent for weekly newspapers, and 10.9 percent for magazines. The second largest group journalists contributed to were online media. 17.1 percent worked for online newsrooms of traditional media, while 13.8 percent of interviewed Latvian journalists worked for stand-alone online news sites. Another 18.8 percent contributed to television stations, and 10.6 percent to radio stations. A relatively small number of journalists (5.6%) had a job within the news agencies.

Participation in professional organizations are not popular in Latvia, as 73.4 percent of the interviewed journalists were not members of any professional associations or unions.

Journalistic Roles

When it comes to professional role orientation, Latvian journalists are almost unanimous that journalists should report things as they are and act as detached observers (see Table 1). Interviewed journalists also found it important to provide analysis of current affairs, to educate the audience, to let people express their views, to tell stories about the world as well as to advocate for social change. All these professional roles, except the necessity to tell stories about the world ($s=1.22$) and to let people express their views ($s=1.08$), showed relatively low standard deviations, suggesting that journalists agree on their importance. Similar consensus among the respondents showed over the little importance of supporting official government policies and conveying a positive image of political leaders.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	340	99.4	4.75	.47
Be a detached observer	336	96.4	4.63	.58
Provide analysis of current affairs	339	79.4	4.19	.95
Educate the audience	340	75.6	4.10	.98
Let people express their views	281	70.1	4.03	1.08
Tell stories about the world	340	68.8	3.82	1.22
Advocate for social change	336	68.2	3.88	.96
Influence public opinion	334	62.3	3.77	.94
Support national development	328	61.9	3.77	1.16
Provide information people need to make political decisions	331	58.0	3.46	1.33
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	334	57.8	3.53	1.16
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	334	56.0	3.61	1.27
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	335	51.9	3.37	1.34
Motivate people to participate in political activity	333	46.5	3.29	1.32
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	329	40.4	3.10	1.23
Monitor and scrutinize business	331	36.0	2.95	1.30
Provide entertainment and relaxation	331	32.3	2.85	1.29
Set the political agenda	327	27.8	2.68	1.28
Be an adversary of the government	309	7.1	1.84	1.00
Support government policy	304	6.9	1.80	.95
Convey a positive image of political leadership	310	4.5	1.45	.87

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.

Other roles of journalists, like supporting national development, providing the kind of news that attracts the largest audience, providing information people need to make political decisions, promoting tolerance and cultural diversity, and monitoring and scrutinizing political leaders as well as motivating people to participate in political activity were evaluated as fairly important. Although, the relatively high

standard deviations for the mentioned roles indicate that the consensus about the relevance of these roles was not too pronounced.

Professional Ethics

Overall, Latvian journalists showed strong commitment to professional standards of ethics and almost unanimously agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Though, answers to the three other options showed some double standard presence, as nearly half of the respondents supported the idea that journalists' ethical decisions could depend on the specific situation or on journalists' personal judgement; nearly one-third agreed that sometimes it could be acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances required it.

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	331	95.2	4.66	.75
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	326	47.2	2.98	1.38
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	335	42.1	2.90	1.35
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	330	32.4	2.75	1.29

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 hidden microphones or cameras	328	14.9	76.2
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	323	11.8	63.5
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	320	9.4	66.3
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	329	8.5	38.9
Claiming to be somebody else	332	6.3	72.0
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	308	5.8	38.6
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	334	3.0	33.8
Paying people for confidential information	306	2.3	38.6
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	336	1.8	2.7
Altering photographs	330	1.2	19.1
Publishing stories with unverified content	337	.9	18.4
Accepting money from sources	337	.9	3.6

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?

When the justification of controversial reporting methods was discussed, Latvian journalists found the use of hidden microphones or cameras, claiming to be somebody else, infiltrating into a firm or organization, as well as the unauthorized use of confidential business or government documents as rather always justified or justified on occasion (see Table 3). Respondents appeared to be rather moderate (not overly enthusiastic, not too deprecatory) about exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story, using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors, making use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures) without

permission, and paying people for confidential information. About one-fifth of respondents stated that it could be justifiable always or on occasions to alter photographs or publish unverified content. Only a minority of respondents found it acceptable to alter or fabricate quotes or to accept money from sources.

Professional Autonomy and Influences

Journalists in Latvia believe that they have a fairly high degree of professional autonomy, as 87.4 percent reported that they have complete or a great deal of freedom when it comes to the selection of stories to work on. Even greater freedom (94.1%) was reported when journalists were asked to measure the level of freedom they have in deciding what aspects to emphasize in their stories. The study revealed that journalists in Latvia are actively engaged in the editorial coordination process: 74.9 percent reported that they participated in editorial meetings and news management activities “always” or “very often”.

News production is influenced by a variety of factors. Among the potential sources of influences mentioned in the interviews, “personal values and beliefs” and “information access” were on the top of the list among Latvian journalists (see Table 4). More than half of the respondents also declared that their work is “extremely” or “very” influenced by journalism ethics, time limits, and the availability of news-gathering resources. Relatively high impact on journalistic work had also such aspects as editorial policy, editorial supervisors and higher editors, audience’s feedback, as well as connections and relationships with news sources.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Your personal values and beliefs	340	71.8	4.02	.94
Information access	340	69.7	3.81	1.03
Journalism ethics	335	61.8	3.63	1.23
Time limits	338	60.1	3.56	1.07
Availability of news-gathering resources	333	58.0	3.54	1.04
Editorial policy	328	44.5	3.33	1.11
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	318	42.8	3.26	.97
Feedback from the audience	340	40.3	3.24	.94
Relationships with news sources	338	39.6	3.11	1.18
Media laws and regulation	333	37.2	2.96	1.29
Your peers on the staff	333	36.9	3.07	1.02
Audience research and data	322	30.1	2.91	1.18
Managers of the news organization	321	22.1	2.54	1.13
Competing news organizations	339	21.2	2.49	1.16
Advertising considerations	300	21.0	2.31	1.20
Owners of the news organization	299	17.4	2.12	1.18
Profit expectations	299	15.4	2.14	1.19
Friends, acquaintances and family	340	10.9	2.23	1.05
Colleagues in other media	340	9.7	2.14	1.01
Public relations	338	9.2	2.14	1.02
Religious considerations	299	7.4	1.65	1.09
Government officials	337	2.7	1.40	.74
Politicians	337	2.4	1.38	.71
Censorship	337	2.4	1.35	.68
Business people	339	2.4	1.50	.77
Pressure groups	330	1.2	1.37	.66
Military, police and state security	336	1.2	1.37	.67

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.

Job practicalities and internal factors seem to be more influential than external constraints. Latvian journalists felt least influenced by sources from within the political or civic realm: the government, politicians, censorship, the military, police and state security, pressure groups, and business people. Religion and public relations were also attributed with a low influence effect, although the relatively high standard deviation indicate possible disagreements among journalists on this.

Within the study, Latvian journalists reported also minor influence from friends, acquaintances and family as well as from colleagues in other media. Likewise, economic influences – stemming from owners and managers, market competition and profit expectations as well as advertising – seem to have rather little relevance in Latvian newsrooms.

Journalism in Transition

The past five years have required media organizations and journalists to embrace fundamental economical and technological changes. The study tried to evaluate these changes and their intensity. To ensure comparability, the questions about changes in journalism were only presented to journalists who had five years or more of professional experience.

According to Latvian journalists, the importance of technical skills and the use of search engines had most profoundly changed over the last five years (see Table 5), gaining scores twice as high as any other provided option. Half of the journalists pointed out that in a five-year-period, interactions with their audiences have increased. Also, the average working hours for journalists have increased as well. At the same time, more than 50.0 percent of journalists reported that the time available for researching stories has decreased significantly over the last five years. Journalists have the feeling that the necessity for a proper education or a specialization in journalism or related field has also decreased. The question about the public credibility of journalism is rather controversial, as respondents almost equally have stated that it has increased (37.7%) and decreased (30.8%). When it comes to evaluation of journalisms’ relevance for society, 39.0 percent of journalists believe that it has increased, while 23.6 percent expressed confidence that it has decreased.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has “increased”	Percentage saying has “decreased”
Technical skills	307	93.5	1.0
The use of search engines	307	88.6	.0
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	296	56.8	11.1
Average working hours of journalists	292	53.1	7.9
Journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions	292	41.1	16.8
The relevance of journalism for society	305	39.0	23.6
The credibility of journalism	305	37.7	30.8
Time available for researching stories	302	20.5	57.9
Having a university degree	291	18.2	30.9
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	289	15.6	32.9

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Latvia. 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 changed as well over the past five years. As shown in Table 6, different sources of potential influences on journalism are listed. Interviewees convincingly reported that they all have increased, except for ethical standards, which gained the same amount of optimistic and pessimistic evaluations. Among all the possible influences, respondents stated that the influence of social media and user-generated content has strengthened the most. Over the past five years, Latvian journalists have noticed that profit making pressures, advertising considerations, overall competition, the impact of public relations, and a pressure toward news-sensationalization have strengthened. Similar developments also apply to audience feedback and audience research.

Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, draugiem.lv	306	91.8	2.0
User-generated contents, such as blogs	298	82.2	9.1
Profit making pressures	297	80.1	2.7
Advertising considerations	296	77.0	4.1
Competition	307	72.6	6.8
Pressure toward sensational news	292	71.6	6.5
Public relations	302	70.5	3.3
Audience involvement in news production	308	67.2	4.2
Audience feedback	305	65.9	12.5
Audience research	295	65.4	9.2
Western ways of practicing journalism	277	53.8	16.2
Journalism education	284	33.5	28.2
Ethical standards	302	32.1	32.1

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

When it comes to trust in general, Latvian journalists seem to be rather cautious. The opinions on whether most people can be trusted or one can never be too careful, the slightly more frequent answer was the second one (55.6%). On the other hand, most journalists (85.7%) believe that people would try to be fair rather than take advantage.

Though when it comes to trust in public institutions, Latvian journalists turned out to only have great confidence in military forces and the news media (see Table 7). These two institutions are followed by the police and religious leaders, but still seem to gain rather low confidence among journalists. Meanwhile, the lowest trust rates among the interviewed journalists received political parties and politicians in general. Rather low faith among journalists also appeared in trade unions, the parliament and the government, as well as courts. Overall, there was a fairly high agreement among the respondents over the question of institutional trust, as low standard deviation values indicate. A considerable disagreement was most pronounced for religious leaders.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The military	324	56.5	3.58	.81
The news media	326	46.1	3.42	.74
The police	322	25.1	3.09	.80
Religious leaders	311	19.3	2.45	1.12
The judiciary/the courts	323	13.6	2.64	.89
The government [Ministru kabinets]	320	13.4	2.85	.69
The parliament [Saeima]	320	9.0	2.64	.74
Trade unions	308	8.7	2.36	.87
Political parties	322	2.5	2.12	.76
Politicians in general	318	2.5	2.26	.71

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>	600 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	purposive quota sampling & convenience sample for newsrooms and based on quota & convenience sample for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	340 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	face-to-face and online
<i>Response rate:</i>	71.88%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	06/2013-12/2014