

Country Report

Journalists in France

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in France is male, in his mid-thirties and holds a university degree in journalism or communication. Of the 228 interviewed journalists, 103 were women, making for a proportion of 45.4 percent of the overall sample. On average, French journalists were 36.64 years old ($s=10.81$); half of the journalists were younger than 34 years. Journalists tend to be well educated: 8.4 percent held a college or Bachelor's degree and 82.7 percent held a Master's degree or equivalent. Another 4.4 percent of the journalists had obtained a doctoral degree, and 0.9 percent had undertaken some university studies but did not complete their studies. Across the whole sample of French journalists, 79.2 percent had specialized in journalism and/or communication.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in France held a full-time position (78.9%), whereas 4.8 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 14.1 percent worked as freelance journalist. Of those with full or part-time employment, 78.3 percent said they held permanent positions, and 21.7 percent worked on a temporary contract.

French journalists are fairly experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 11.84 years ($s=9.81$), and about half of them had more than nine years of professional experience. Most journalists indicated that they worked on various topics and subjects (75.6%). The remaining 24.4 percent of the respondents worked on a specific desk, such as politics, local news, or sports. On the whole, French journalists worked for 1.57 newsrooms ($s=1.63$); 18.9 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. The minority of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (27.7%).

The majority of French journalists in the sample worked for print media: 45.1 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 7.6 percent to weekly newspapers, and 4.9 percent to magazines. Another 19.6 percent of the journalists worked for private or public service television, and 8.9 percent for private or public radio. Few journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agencies (2.2%), for online newsrooms of traditional media (4.5%), and for stand-alone online news sites (7.1%).

Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, French journalists found it most important to report things as they are, to provide analysis of current affairs, to be a detached observer, and to let people express their views (see Table 1). The relevance of these "classic" roles was fairly undisputed among the interviewed journalists as the relatively low standard deviations indicate. Likewise, there was a strong consensus among the respondents over the little importance of supporting

government policy, conveying a positive image of political leadership, and being an adversary of the government.

Still, a majority of journalists in France found it important to provide information people need to make political decisions, and to monitor and scrutinize political leaders. Politically more assertive roles, on the other hand, were supported by only a minority of respondents. Following traits belong to these roles: advocating for social change, supporting national development, influencing public opinion, setting the political agenda, and acting as adversary of the government.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	227	96.5	4.73	.52
Provide analysis of current affairs	220	77.7	4.09	.84
Be a detached observer	223	77.6	4.19	.94
Let people express their views	222	72.1	4.02	.98
Provide information people need to make political decisions	221	67.9	3.88	1.17
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	221	56.1	3.64	.92
Monitor and scrutinize business	222	45.0	3.41	1.02
Motivate people to participate in political activity	213	39.9	3.06	1.32
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	222	29.7	2.96	1.06
Advocate for social change	206	21.4	2.51	1.22
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	223	21.1	2.67	1.15
Support national development	193	18.1	2.43	1.25
Influence public opinion	208	15.4	2.27	1.11
Set the political agenda	214	15.0	2.44	1.05
Provide entertainment and relaxation	220	11.8	2.26	1.06
Support government policy	203	1.5	1.26	.63
Convey a positive image of political leadership	204	1.0	1.21	.52
Be an adversary of the government	189	.5	1.35	.64

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

French journalists generally demonstrated a strong commitment to professional standards of ethics. The majority of the respondents agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Furthermore, only one out of five journalists agreed with the view their ethical decisions are a matter of personal judgment. Two out of five journalists thought that it is sometimes acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it. However, slightly fewer than half of the interviewees subscribed to the idea that journalists' ethical decisions depend on the specific situation.

The picture was mixed with regards to a selected number of potentially controversial reporting techniques. A large majority of journalists in France found the use of hidden microphones or cameras, undercover research to gain inside information, claiming to be somebody else as well as the use of confidential business or government documents without authorization justifiable at least on occasion (see Table 3). Still, less than half of the journalists thought it was acceptable to pay people for confidential information, to make use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures) without permission, to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story, and to use re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors. Only a minority of journalists found it permissible to alter or fabricate photographs or quotes from sources and to publish unverified content. The practice of "brown envelope

journalism” – that is, journalists taking money from sources, presumably in return for positive coverage – was almost unanimously condemned by French journalists.

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	226	89.4	4.46	.76
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	225	49.3	3.11	1.38
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	222	38.3	3.06	1.28
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	222	23.9	2.55	1.20

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	224	43.3	51.3
Using hidden microphones or cameras	216	13.4	74.5
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	215	11.6	60.9
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	218	4.6	34.4
Claiming to be somebody else	224	4.5	54.9
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	213	2.8	23.5
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	219	2.3	31.5
Paying people for confidential information	215	.5	37.7
Altering photographs	222	.5	5.9
Publishing stories with unverified content	223	.0	2.7
Accepting money from sources	226	.0	.4
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	222	.0	5.9

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 France reported some degree of professional autonomy. More than three out of five respondents (63.4%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. With a total of 67.5 percent, the number of respondents who had complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story was even higher. Still, about half of the journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) “always” or “very often” (50.9%).

News production is influenced by a variety of factors. Among the potential sources of influences mentioned in the interview, journalism ethics fared on top of the list among French respondents (see Table 4). A majority of journalists found their work substantively constrained by time limits and by information access (or lack thereof).

Overall, internal factors were found to be more influential than external constraints. French journalists felt little influenced by sources from within the political and civic realm: censorship, the military, police and state security, public relations, business people, the government, politicians, and pressure groups. They also reported only 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 little relevance in French newsrooms.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	224	78.6	4.21	.89
Time limits	225	61.8	3.80	1.06
Information access	223	54.3	3.54	1.03
Media laws and regulation	224	40.2	3.16	1.13
Editorial policy	226	39.8	3.23	1.04
Availability of news-gathering resources	217	37.8	3.27	1.02
Your personal values and beliefs	222	33.3	3.00	1.13
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	221	24.0	2.89	.96
Relationships with news sources	221	22.6	2.75	1.08
Your peers on the staff	224	21.4	2.83	.88
Competing news organizations	224	20.5	2.68	.95
Audience research and data	220	18.2	2.65	1.06
Feedback from the audience	225	16.9	2.56	.98
Friends, acquaintances and family	228	14.5	2.29	.98
Managers of the news organization	214	14.0	2.31	1.04
Colleagues in other media	226	12.4	2.42	.94
Owners of the news organization	207	10.6	2.01	1.05
Profit expectations	208	6.3	1.96	.97
Censorship	211	6.2	1.77	.97
Military, police and state security	214	4.2	1.67	.86
Public relations	219	4.1	1.80	.86
Advertising considerations	211	2.8	1.85	.85
Business people	217	2.8	1.42	.75
Government officials	218	.9	1.48	.64
Politicians	219	.9	1.54	.68
Pressure groups	218	.9	1.43	.61

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 in a state of change. According to French journalists, the importance of technical skills and the use of search engines had most profoundly changed over the last five years (see Table 5). Overall, the journalists’ responses point to a substantive deterioration of working conditions in the profession. A large majority of respondents reported an increase in their average working hours. Furthermore, most interviewed journalists felt that their professional freedom and the time available for researching stories had dropped. Another major concern for French journalists was the decrease in journalism’s public credibility.

Influences on journalism and news production have changed as well. With the exception of ethical standards, influences on journalists have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6. Here, it was especially the influence of social media, user-generated contents, audience research, and competition that had strengthened the most during the past five years. A majority of French journalists reported an increase for market-related influences – such as a pressure toward sensational news, profit making pressures, and advertising considerations – as well as for audience feedback. Ethical standards were the only source of influence that had substantively weakened over the years.

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

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
The use of search engines	139	94.2	.0
Technical skills	140	91.4	.7
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	137	75.9	5.8
Average working hours of journalists	136	69.9	16.2
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	130	55.4	6.9
Having a university degree	129	46.5	9.3
The relevance of journalism for society	135	19.3	53.3
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	134	11.9	45.5
The credibility of journalism	137	7.3	80.3
Time available for researching stories	137	5.1	87.6

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in France. 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	139	92.8	2.2
User-generated contents, such as blogs	139	85.6	2.2
Audience research	140	85.0	.7
Competition	139	83.5	5.8
Pressure toward sensational news	138	79.0	2.9
Profit making pressures	137	77.4	2.9
Audience involvement in news production	134	76.1	3.0
Audience feedback	137	70.1	3.6
Advertising considerations	135	69.6	4.4
Journalism education	132	66.7	14.4
Public relations	133	53.4	3.8
Ethical standards	134	27.6	35.8

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

Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	35,000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	stratified proportionally random sampling for newsrooms and simply random for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	228 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	telephone, face-to-face and online
<i>Response rate:</i>	-
<i>Period of field research:</i>	12/2014-11/2015