

Country Report

Journalists in Ireland

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Ireland is male, in his late-thirties and holds a university degree in journalism or communication. Of the 304 interviewed journalists, 127 were women, making for a proportion of 41.9 percent of the overall sample. On average, Irish journalists were 39.18 years old ($s=11.27$); half of the journalists were younger than 38 years. Journalists tend to be well educated: 40.2 percent of the respondents held a degree from a graduate program and 44.8 percent held a Bachelor's degree. Another 0.6 percent of the journalists had obtained a doctoral degree, and 8.6 percent had undertaken some university studies but did not complete their studies. Across the whole sample of Irish journalists, 73.0 percent had specialized in journalism and/or communication.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Ireland held a full-time position (81.5%), whereas 3.3 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 12.5 percent worked as freelance journalists. Of those with full or part-time employment, 87.2 percent said they held permanent positions, and 12.8 percent worked on a temporary contract.

Irish journalists are fairly experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 15.25 years ($s=10.85$), and about half of them had more than 15 years of professional experience. Most journalists worked on a specific desk (63.5%), such as politics, local news, or sports. The remaining 36.5 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on various topics and subjects. On the whole, Irish journalists worked for 1.22 newsrooms ($s=.63$); 19.6 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. The majority of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (64.7%).

Across the whole sample, 4.9 percent of the interviewees were true multimedia journalists, as they indicated to work for various media types simultaneously. The majority of Irish journalists in the sample worked for print media: 34.5 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 25.0 percent to weekly newspapers, and 1.4 percent to magazines. Another 14.1 percent of the journalists worked for private or public service television, and 17.3 for private or public radio. Few journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agencies (1.8%), for online newsrooms of traditional media (6.0%), and for stand-alone online news sites (8.5%).

Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, Irish journalists found it most important to report things as they are, to be a detached observer, and to educate the audience (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 and conveying a positive image of political leadership.

Still, a majority of journalists in Ireland found it important to tell stories about the world, to provide analysis of current affairs, to monitor and scrutinize political leaders, to let people express their views, to provide information people need to make political decisions, and to monitor and scrutinize business. 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, influencing public opinion, supporting national development, 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	301	94.4	4.63	.66
Be a detached observer	302	75.2	4.05	.94
Educate the audience	300	72.7	3.93	1.01
Tell stories about the world	299	67.9	3.78	1.17
Provide analysis of current affairs	300	63.0	3.71	1.13
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	301	61.5	3.66	1.26
Let people express their views	298	61.4	3.70	1.12
Provide information people need to make political decisions	297	54.2	3.42	1.28
Monitor and scrutinize business	300	50.7	3.44	1.25
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	301	48.5	3.42	1.22
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	301	42.9	3.37	1.10
Advocate for social change	299	36.8	3.08	1.22
Provide entertainment and relaxation	299	36.8	3.10	1.16
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	302	25.8	2.76	1.17
Influence public opinion	297	25.6	2.80	1.15
Support national development	294	24.5	2.69	1.20
Motivate people to participate in political activity	299	22.7	2.49	1.25
Set the political agenda	303	20.5	2.53	1.16
Be an adversary of the government	297	16.8	2.31	1.21
Convey a positive image of political leadership	300	3.0	1.49	.79
Support government policy	298	1.7	1.38	.67

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

Irish 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, more than three out of five journalists disagreed with the view 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. However, more 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 Ireland found the use of confidential business or government documents without authorization, the use of recreations or dramatizations of news by actors, undercover research to gain inside information as well as the use of hidden microphones or cameras justifiable at least on occasion (see Table 3). Still, most journalists thought it was acceptable to pay people for confidential information and to make use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures) without permission. Slightly less than half of the respondents

thought it was justifiable to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story and to claim to be somebody else. Only a minority of journalists found it permissible to alter photographs or quotes from sources as well as to publish stories with 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 Irish 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	300	87.7	4.37	.89
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	302	59.3	3.28	1.38
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	303	37.3	2.78	1.37
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	302	35.1	2.64	1.32

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	302	21.5	70.2
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	298	9.7	73.8
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	302	7.0	75.8
Using hidden microphones or cameras	300	5.0	83.0
Altering photographs	301	2.7	15.9
Paying people for confidential information	303	2.6	49.5
Accepting money from sources	303	2.3	.7
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	302	2.3	2.6
Publishing stories with unverified content	300	2.0	15.7
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	299	1.7	53.8
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	300	1.3	45.3
Claiming to be somebody else	301	1.0	43.5

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 Ireland reported a fairly high degree of professional autonomy. Three out of five respondents (62.2%) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. With a total of 72.6 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, almost half of the journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) “always” or “very often” (49.8%).

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 Irish respondents (see Table 4). A majority of journalists found their work substantively constrained by time limits, by information access (or lack thereof), by

the availability (or non-availability) of news-gathering resources, and by media laws and regulation. Also, more than half of the respondents admitted their work was influenced by editorial policy as well as editorial supervisors and higher editors.

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

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	291	79.4	4.16	.86
Time limits	291	72.5	3.96	.91
Information access	301	71.4	3.88	.83
Availability of news-gathering resources	292	66.1	3.84	.91
Media laws and regulation	300	62.3	3.74	1.00
Editorial policy	292	55.5	3.61	1.06
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	287	55.1	3.56	.95
Your personal values and beliefs	288	46.5	3.45	1.05
Relationships with news sources	296	45.9	3.37	1.05
Feedback from the audience	300	30.3	3.03	.94
Competing news organizations	300	29.7	2.95	1.03
Audience research and data	285	28.1	2.89	1.12
Your peers on the staff	288	27.4	2.97	.93
Censorship	300	18.0	2.33	1.19
Owners of the news organization	265	13.6	2.26	1.15
Military, police and state security	299	12.0	2.10	1.15
Politicians	300	11.3	2.18	1.11
Government officials	300	11.0	2.16	1.07
Managers of the news organization	272	10.7	2.22	1.08
Advertising considerations	268	10.4	2.07	1.09
Pressure groups	299	9.7	2.13	1.04
Colleagues in other media	301	9.6	2.49	.92
Public relations	298	9.1	2.31	.94
Friends, acquaintances and family	301	8.3	2.20	.97
Business people	300	8.0	2.11	.99
Profit expectations	260	7.3	1.98	1.06
Religious considerations	240	2.9	1.55	.84

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 Irish 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 the 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 Irish 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 and journalism education, influences on journalists have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6. Here, it was especially the influence of social media, user-generated contents, and competition that had strengthened the most during the past five years. A majority of Irish journalists reported an increase for market-related influences – such as profit making pressures, advertising considerations, audience research, and a pressure toward sensational news – 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"
Technical skills	227	98.7	.4
The use of search engines	225	96.9	.0
Average working hours of journalists	225	90.2	1.3
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	224	58.5	23.7
Having a university degree	223	53.8	5.4
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	225	52.9	6.7
The relevance of journalism for society	225	36.4	27.1
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	223	17.0	40.8
The credibility of journalism	225	12.9	53.8
Time available for researching stories	222	2.3	89.6

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Ireland. 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	228	97.8	.4
User-generated contents, such as blogs	227	86.3	4.8
Competition	226	82.3	7.5
Audience involvement in news production	227	70.0	4.0
Audience feedback	224	69.6	3.1
Profit making pressures	224	68.8	3.1
Advertising considerations	227	60.8	4.8
Audience research	224	60.3	6.3
Pressure toward sensational news	226	56.2	4.9
Public relations	226	46.5	8.0
Journalism education	226	41.2	30.5
Western ways of practicing journalism	217	41.0	6.9
Ethical standards	226	35.0	38.9

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in Ireland. 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 public institutions, Irish journalists turned out to have reasonable faith in the judicial system, the military, and their own institution – the news media (see Table 7). Major political institutions – such as the parliament, trade unions, and the government – were found trustworthy by only a minority of Irish journalists. Remarkably, Irish journalists seem to have more trust in the military than in politicians, political parties and religious leaders. The interviewed journalists had relatively little confidence in those three institutions. Overall, there was a fairly high agreement among the respondents over the question of institutional trust, as low standard deviation values indicate. 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 judiciary/the courts	286	45.1	3.31	.81
The news media	287	34.1	3.21	.69
The military	287	33.1	3.22	.78
The police	287	20.6	2.86	.81
Trade unions	287	15.7	2.82	.76
The parliament	287	11.1	2.79	.72
The government	285	4.2	2.55	.71
Religious leaders	285	3.5	2.20	.86
Politicians in general	287	2.8	2.53	.69
Political parties	286	1.7	2.40	.69

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>	1,500 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	online and mail/e-mail
<i>Sample size:</i>	304 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	simple random sampling for newsrooms and simply random for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Response rate:</i>	29.0%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	02/2014-08/2015