

Country Report

Journalists in Bulgaria

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Bulgaria is female, in her early forties and holds a university degree in journalism or another field. Of the 263 interviewed journalists, 170 were women, making for a proportion of 64.6 percent of the overall sample. On average, Bulgarian journalists were 41.74 years old ($s=10.40$); half of the journalists were 41 years old and younger. Journalists tend to be well educated: 71.1 percent of the respondents held a degree from a graduate program and 20.5 percent held a Bachelor's degree. Another 4.9 percent of the journalists had obtained a doctoral degree, and 2.7 percent had undertaken some university studies but did not complete their studies. Of those respondents who held a university degree, the majority (60.5%) had specialized in communication or journalism. Across the whole sample of Bulgarian journalists, 39.2 percent had specialized in journalism, 12.5 percent had studied in another communication field, and 8.7 percent had specialized in both journalism and another communication field. 39.5 percent had not specialized in communication or journalism.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Bulgaria held a full-time position (84%), whereas 4.2 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employment, and 10.3 percent worked as freelance journalists. Of those with full or part-time employment, 97.8 percent said they held permanent positions, and 2.2 percent worked on a temporary contract.

Bulgarian journalists are fairly experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 19.36 years ($s=9.54$), and nearly half of them had more than 20 years of professional experience. Most journalists worked on various topics and subjects (55.9%). 44.1 percent had a specific desk such as politics, economy, culture, crime and law, foreign politics or sports. The remaining 40.1 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on various topics and subjects. On the whole, Bulgarian journalists worked for 1.90 newsrooms ($s=0.867$); 34.2 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. The majority of journalists were not members of a professional association (only 38.8% were).

Nearly two-thirds of the Bulgarian journalists surveyed indicated that they worked for various media types simultaneously (63.9%). The majority of Bulgarian journalists in the sample worked for online newsrooms of traditional media (61.2%). 18.6 percent worked for stand-alone online news sites. Nearly half worked for print media: 26.6 percent contributed to daily newspapers, 11.8 percent to weekly newspapers, and 11 percent to magazines. Another 25.1 percent of the journalists worked for television stations, and 16.7 percent for radio stations. Few journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agencies (4.6%).

Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, Bulgarian journalists found it most important to report things as they are, to educate the audience, to provide analysis of current affairs, to be a detached observer, and to let people express their views (see Table 1). It is notable that a very high percentage of Bulgarian journalists also believed that supporting national development was extremely or very important for them. However, national development was not understood in the sense of supporting government policy or indeed conveying a positive image of political leadership. Other politically assertive roles such as influencing public opinion and advocating for social change were also supported by the majority of Bulgarian journalists but only a minority supported roles such as setting the political agenda and being an adversary of the government.

Similarly, monitoring and scrutinizing political leaders and business was of significant importance to roughly half of all Bulgarian journalists. A majority of journalists in Bulgaria also found it important to promote tolerance and cultural diversity, to tell stories about the world, and to provide information people need to make political decisions. A minority reported that it was important to provide entertainment and relaxation, and to provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very important"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	263	98.8	4.85	.41
Educate the audience	263	89.7	4.50	.79
Be a detached observer	263	89.0	3.96	1.26
Let people express their views	263	88.2	4.46	.88
Provide analysis of current affairs	263	84.8	4.40	.83
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	263	82.5	4.35	.94
Support national development	262	80.9	4.23	1.00
Tell stories about the world	263	77.6	4.14	.96
Advocate for social change	263	69.6	4.00	1.17
Provide information people need to make political decisions	263	68.8	3.79	1.30
Influence public opinion	262	60.7	3.72	1.10
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	263	56.3	3.63	1.17
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	263	54.0	3.51	1.20
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	263	48.3	3.43	1.58
Monitor and scrutinize business	260	47.3	3.47	1.23
Provide entertainment and relaxation	261	38.3	3.09	1.33
Be an adversary of the government	261	35.2	3.01	1.29
Motivate people to participate in political activity	261	35.2	2.97	1.35
Set the political agenda	263	24.3	2.7	1.19
Support government policy	260	3.5	1.60	.91
Convey a positive image of political leadership	262	2.7	1.47	.79

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

Almost all Bulgarian journalists agreed that journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of the situation and context (see Table 2). However, more than a third said they believed that what is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgement and for a quarter what is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation. The answers to the question as to whether it was acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it should be disregarded because the question was not correctly translated in Bulgarian.

With regard to using controversial reporting practices, Bulgarian journalists found a range of techniques justified at least on occasion such as using hidden microphones or cameras, claiming to be somebody else, getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information and using confidential business or government documents without authorization (see Table 3). Only a minority of journalists found it permissible to pay people for confidential information, to use re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors, to make use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures) without permission and to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story. Several practices were condemned by Bulgarian journalists such as the practice of “brown envelope journalism” – that is, journalists taking money from sources, presumably in return for positive coverage – as well as altering or fabricating quotes from sources, and publishing stories with unverified content.

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	263	97.7	4.73	.55
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	263	35.7	2.73	1.52
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	263	35.4	2.43	1.47
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	263	24.3	2.14	1.33

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	262	12.2	63.0
Using hidden microphones or cameras	261	10.7	75.5
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	262	8.4	55.3
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	263	4.6	33.1
Paying people for confidential information	263	2.7	49.0
Claiming to be somebody else	261	1.5	55.2
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	262	1.1	23.3
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	261	.4	16.1
Publishing stories with unverified content	262	.0	3.8
Accepting money from sources	263	.0	1.9
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	263	.0	2.3
Altering photographs	262	.0	13.7

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 Bulgaria reported a high degree of professional autonomy. 82.5 percent said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. With a total of 86.3 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 three quarters reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) “always” or “very often” (74.9%).

News production is influenced by a variety of factors. Nearly all Bulgarian journalists indicated that their personal values and beliefs, and journalism ethics were extremely or very influential sources of influence (see Table 4). A majority of journalists found their work substantively constrained by information access (or lack thereof), by editorial policy, by media laws and regulation, by the availability (or non-availability) of news-gathering resources and by time limits. Also, more than half of the respondents admitted their work was influenced by the feedback from the audience and audience research and data. Nearly half of Bulgarian journalists indicated that internal factors were very influential - editorial supervisors and higher editors, and managers of their news organization. They reported only minor influence from external sources such as politicians, government officials, business people, the military, police and state security, pressure groups and colleagues in other media.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Your personal values and beliefs	261	93.1	4.59	.73
Journalism ethics	259	90.7	4.42	.81
Information access	247	76.9	4.11	.92
Editorial policy	253	70.8	3.81	1.05
Media laws and regulation	239	66.5	3.77	1.16
Availability of news-gathering resources	244	66.4	3.76	1.09
Time limits	247	64.4	3.77	1.03
Feedback from the audience	256	61.7	3.67	1.03
Audience research and data	248	53.6	3.49	1.11
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	246	46.7	3.43	1.19
Managers of the news organization	240	45.8	3.35	1.14
Relationships with news sources	239	41.0	3.13	1.14
Owners of the news organization	226	40.3	3.15	1.26
Advertising considerations	220	36.8	2.99	1.25
Profit expectations	213	31.9	2.89	1.22
Your peers on the staff	255	29.4	3.06	.93
Competing news organizations	237	26.2	2.77	1.15
Friends, acquaintances and family	233	22.7	2.61	1.14
Censorship	201	22.4	2.38	1.35
Religious considerations	201	17.9	2.29	1.24
Public relations	233	16.7	2.30	1.13
Politicians	204	13.2	2.06	1.24
Government officials	199	13.1	2.09	1.20
Business people	203	11.8	2.01	1.19
Military, police and state security	181	11.6	2.01	1.16
Pressure groups	190	8.9	1.86	1.12
Colleagues in other media	217	7.8	2.11	.94

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 throughout the world and even more so in Bulgaria where a range of transformations had taken place in Bulgarian society as a result of the transition from communism to democracy and capitalism. The majority of Bulgarian journalists reported largely negative trends over the past five years (see Table 5). Unsurprisingly, the importance of technical skills and the use of search engines had most profoundly changed over the last five years. Overall, the journalists' responses point to a substantive deterioration of working conditions in the profession and a declining credibility of journalism. A large majority of respondents reported an increase in their average working hours and a decrease in the time available for

researching stories. Furthermore, more than two thirds of Bulgarian journalists felt that the credibility of journalism had decreased and the majority also said that the relevance of journalism for society had also decreased.

Influences on journalism and news production have changed as well. Influences on journalists have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6 with the exception of ethical standards and journalism education. Here, it was especially the influence of social media, audience involvement in news production, user-generated contents, and audience feedback that had become stronger for most Bulgarian journalists during the past five years. A majority of Bulgarian journalists reported an increase for market-related influences as well such as profit making pressures, public relations, pressure towards sensational news, audience research, advertising considerations, and competition. Ethical standards and journalism education were the only sources 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	246	93.5	1.2
The use of search engines	244	92.2	0
Average working hours of journalists	245	75.9	1.6
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	244	72.5	11.1
Having a university degree	245	40.8	15.5
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	246	34.6	30.1
The relevance of journalism for society	247	25.1	57.9
The credibility of journalism	246	17.5	66.7
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	244	15.6	30.3
Time available for researching stories	244	13.5	64.8

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in [country]. 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, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.	247	98.0	.8
Audience involvement in news production	242	87.2	3.7
User-generated contents, such as blogs	245	85.3	3.7
Audience feedback	244	79.9	3.3
Profit making pressures	243	74.1	7.8
Public relations	242	70.2	5.4
Pressure toward sensational news	247	70.0	6.9
Audience research	245	66.9	9.8
Advertising considerations	247	66.8	15.0
Competition	246	65.9	19.1
Western ways of practicing journalism	243	51.9	15.2
Ethical standards	246	23.6	61.4
Journalism education	246	19.5	51.6

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

The levels of trust in public institutions and the news media among Bulgarian journalists are very low (see Table 7). In fact, the level of trust in the judiciary/the courts are the lowest of all 53 countries in which this question was asked and the level of trust in the government is the second lowest among all 53 countries. Bulgarian journalists had the highest level of confidence in the news media and still in comparison with the other 52 countries, the score was very low – the third lowest after Greece and South Korea. Similarly, the levels of trust in most other public institutions are among the lowest around the world. Bulgarian journalists seem to have more trust in the military and the police than in the government, their parliament or politicians and political parties. The latter were found to be most untrustworthy among all institutions. Overall, there was a fairly high agreement among the respondents over the question of institutional trust, as low standard deviation values indicate.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying “complete” and “a great deal of trust”	Mean	Standard Deviation
The news media	260	11.0	2.62	.81
The military	260	6.5	2.35	.85
The police	259	4.6	2.18	.83
The government [“Министерски съвет”/правителството]	260	4.2	2.17	.85
The judiciary/the courts	262	3.8	2.02	.85
The parliament [“Народното събрание”]	262	3.8	2.14	.84
Religious leaders	260	3.8	1.84	.89
Trade unions	260	3.1	2.05	.82
Politicians in general	262	1.5	1.82	.75
Political parties	261	1.1	1.85	.74

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>	5800
<i>Sampling method:</i>	Purposive quota sampling of organizations Simple random / convenience sample of journalists
<i>Sample size:</i>	263
<i>Interview methods:</i>	Online survey
<i>Response rate:</i>	28.3%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	2016-2017