

Country Report

Journalists in Austria

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in Austria is male, in his early-forties and holds a university degree in a field different from journalism or communication. Of the 818 interviewed journalists, 316 were women, making for a proportion of 40.8 percent of the overall sample (N=774). On average, Austrian journalists were 43.00 years old ($s=9.87$, $n=719$); half of the journalists were younger than 43 years. Most journalists received higher education (N=767): 63.3 percent of the respondents held a university degree, including 46.2 percent who held a Master's degree and 8.1 percent who held a Bachelor's degree. Another 9.0 percent of the journalists had obtained a doctoral degree, and 13.4 percent had undertaken some university studies but did not complete their studies. Of those respondents who held a university degree, 45.4 percent had not specialized in communication or journalism, while the remaining 54.6 percent specialized in fields such as journalism and/or communication studies.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in Austria held a full-time position (77.0%), whereas 14.4 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 8.3 percent worked as freelance journalist. Of those with full or part-time employment, 97.3 percent said they held permanent positions, and 2.7 percent worked on a temporary contract.

Austrian journalists are fairly experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 17.94 years ($s=9.79$, $n=785$), and about half of them had more than 17 years of professional experience. Most journalists worked on a specific desk (61.1%, $n=813$), such as politics, local news, or sports. The remaining 38.9 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on various topics and subjects. On the whole, Austrian journalists worked for 1.20 newsrooms ($s=0.80$); 20.2 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism (N=799). Almost half of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (49.4%, $n=805$).

Across the whole sample, 32.9 percent of the interviewees indicated to work for more than one media outlet simultaneously. Hence, the following data is taking into account the double entries regarding the journalists' media outlet: The majority of Austrian journalists in the sample worked for daily print media (38.0%; 19.6% for weekly newspaper and 6.2% for magazines); 18.5 percent for private or public television, 18.1 percent for private or public radio. Additionally, journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agencies (3.4%), for online newsrooms of traditional media (19.1%), and for stand-alone online news sites (7.2%).

Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, Austrian journalists found it most important to report things as they are, to provide analysis of current affairs and to be a detached observer (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 Austria found it important to tell stories about the world, provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience, provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life and promote tolerance and cultural diversity. 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, acting as adversary of the government, influencing public opinion, supporting national development and setting the political agenda.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	807	95.5	4.63	.61
Provide analysis of current affairs	814	89.6	4.44	.79
Be a detached observer	812	88.3	4.41	.81
Tell stories about the world	806	65.4	3.78	1.06
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	815	60.7	3.73	1.03
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	813	63.3	3.70	1.06
Promote tolerance and cultural diversity	806	65.0	3.80	1.08
Provide information people need to make political decisions	792	63.1	3.67	1.26
Educate the audience	798	53.6	3.55	1.04
Provide entertainment and relaxation	812	46.7	3.37	1.11
Motivate people to participate in political activity	789	49.3	3.32	1.26
Let people express their views	799	51.1	3.42	1.11
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	769	45.4	3.18	1.38
Monitor and scrutinize business	773	39.8	3.03	1.36
Advocate for social change	786	32.4	2.96	1.17
Be an adversary of the government	752	20.3	2.46	1.24
Influence public opinion	781	17.4	2.59	1.06
Support national development	747	13.4	2.33	1.08
Set the political agenda	766	9.8	2.22	1.01
Support government policy	753	.9	1.34	.65
Convey a positive image of political leadership	751	.7	1.27	.58

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

Austrian journalists generally demonstrated a strong commitment to professional standards of ethics. The respondents almost unanimously agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Furthermore, almost nine out of ten journalists disagreed with the view their ethical decisions are a matter of personal judgment and even more journalists disagreed that sometimes it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if

extraordinary circumstances require it. Ironically, about 40 percent of the interviewees subscribed also 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 Austria found the use of confidential business or government documents without authorization as well as undercover research to gain inside information justifiable at least on occasion (see Table 3). Still, more than half of the journalists thought it was acceptable to use re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors, about 42 percent of the interviewees agreed upon publishing stories with unverified content on occasion. Only a minority of journalists found it permissible to make use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures) without permission and to exert pressure on unwilling informants to get a story. The practice of “brown envelope journalism” – that is, journalists taking money from sources, presumably in return for positive coverage – was almost unanimously condemned by Austrian 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	812	94.3	4.64	.61
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	798	40.7	3.03	1.23
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	802	14.5	2.31	1.07
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	792	9.3	1.95	1.02

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	750	18.1	61.9
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	764	8.0	62.4
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	708	7.9	44.6
Using hidden microphones or cameras	770	4.5	61.8
Paying people for confidential information	761	2.4	42.2
Claiming to be somebody else	772	1.6	47.0
Publishing stories with unverified content	776	.9	43.2
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	785	.3	21.4
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	773	.3	16.9
Accepting money from sources	797	.1	1.4

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 Austria reported a fairly high degree of professional autonomy. A majority of the respondents (78.7%, N=811) said that they had complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. With a total of 90.1 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 (N=809). Still a majority of journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) “always” or “very often” (51.0%, N=804).

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 Austrian respondents (see Table 4). A majority of journalists found their work substantively constrained by time limits, by their personal values and beliefs, by the availability (or non-availability) of news-gathering resources as well as by the information access (or lack thereof).

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

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 Austrian newsrooms.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	785	68.7	3.87	.93
Time limits	793	61.5	3.70	.99
Personal values and beliefs	790	55.8	3.61	1.01
Availability of news-gathering resources	777	52.8	3.53	1.00
Information access	772	50.6	3.42	1.09
Editorial policy	776	34.1	3.09	1.02
Relationships with news sources	769	28.0	2.78	1.14
Media laws and regulation	756	26.5	2.77	1.12
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	791	26.4	2.92	.94
Feedback from the audience	784	19.4	2.74	.92
Audience research and data	775	19.4	2.58	1.05
Peers on the staff	787	15.4	2.64	.84
Competing news organizations	783	12.8	2.46	.93
Managers of your news organization	775	11.7	2.18	.97
Profit expectations	760	10.4	2.10	1.07
Owners of your news organization	748	9.8	2.04	.97
Advertising considerations	765	9.3	1.97	1.02
Friends, acquaintances and family	781	6.7	2.09	.86
Colleagues in other media	783	5.0	2.06	.79
Public relations	773	4.9	2.05	.85
The military, police and state security	765	4.7	1.53	.89
Religious considerations	750	3.2	1.47	.77
Business people	770	3.0	1.65	.79
Pressure groups	770	2.2	1.76	.76
Politicians	768	2.0	1.55	.75
Censorship	753	1.5	1.27	.61
Government officials	762	1.2	1.37	.65

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 Austrian journalists, the importance of the use of search engines and technical skills 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 Austrian 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, competition and user-generated contents, that had strengthened the most during the past five years. A majority of Austrian journalists reported an increase for market-related influences – such as profit making pressures, advertising considerations, audience feedback, and the audience involvement in news production – as well as for public relations. Ethical standards were the only source of influence that had 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	712	93.4	.3
Technical skills	709	90.6	1.7
Average working hours of journalists	704	74.0	5.7
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	696	68.0	8.3
Having a university degree	684	33.5	16.4
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	677	33.5	15.7
The relevance of journalism for society	700	20.6	40.9
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	698	13.2	36.4
The credibility of journalism	703	6.0	64.6
Time available for researching stories	712	3.9	86.9

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in Austria. 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 and Twitter	713	97.6	.4
Competition	709	91.4	1.0
User-generated contents, such as blogs	696	88.6	2.2
Profit making pressures	690	82.5	1.6
Advertising considerations	686	74.3	2.2
Audience feedback	700	68.9	3.3
Audience involvement in news production	684	65.5	3.8
Journalism education	672	65.2	14.7
Public relations	689	64.3	3.2
Audience research	672	62.8	4.5
Pressure toward sensational news	693	58.0	3.3
Ethical standards	684	27.5	36.5

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in ["Austria"]. 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, Austrian journalists turned out to have the most faith in two institutions: their own institution (the news media) as well as the judicial system, followed by the police (see Table 7). Still, major political institutions – such as the parliament as well as trade unions – were still found trustworthy by a quarter of the Austrian journalists interviewed, although respondents did not hold them in particularly high esteem. Remarkably, Austrian journalists seem to have more trust in the military than in the government, religious leaders and politicians in general as well as in political parties. The interviewed journalists had relatively little confidence in the former two. 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 the parliament as well as the police and trade unions.

Table 7: Journalistic trust in institutions

	N	Percentage saying "complete" and "a great deal of trust"	Mean	Standard Deviation
The news media	724	44.5	3.35	.74
The judiciary/the courts	724	40.5	3.24	.85
The police	723	31.5	3.04	.88
The parliament	708	26.6	2.97	.84
Trade unions	723	24.3	2.87	.91
The military	696	17.8	2.63	.93
The government	715	12.9	2.63	.81
Religious leaders	707	7.5	2.13	.97
Politicians in general	713	3.2	2.41	.71
Political parties	712	3.1	2.27	.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>	3,500 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	Stratified proportionally systematic sampling for newsrooms and stratified random sampling for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	818 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	Telephone interviews and online-survey
<i>Response rate:</i>	29%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	11/2014-08/2015