



Country Report

Journalists in New Zealand

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Backgrounds of Journalists

The majority of New Zealand journalists (50.4%) are women. However, this numeric majority does not result in increased power, as this survey showed women are still disadvantaged in a range of ways. Women are on average six years younger than men, and have 5.30 years less work experience. This demonstrates that journalists from both genders are, on average, joining the industry at around the same age, i.e. when they are 26 to 27 years old. Yet, women are significantly under-represented in junior and senior management roles, where their numbers are far fewer than those of men. While only half of men work in non-management roles, that is the case for two-thirds of women. While at first sight the bias towards men in management roles may be because they are more experienced, closer examination shows that is not the case. In fact, the five-year gap in experience holds true in both junior and senior ranks, thus negating any role that experience may play. Given that women have predominated in the profession since at least 2007, and probably several years before that, this suggests that women are not being considered equally for promotion. Similarly, women are also paid significantly less, an aspect further examined in the following section. Adding to these aspects is the fact that women tend to be significantly more likely to have a university degree. Women also appear to be in more tenuous employment conditions, with slightly fewer of them in full-time employment. The difference is not statistically significant, however.

Journalists in this survey were slightly older on average than in previous surveys. The median age was 44 years, and the mean age 43.66 years ($s=13.26$). Most journalists had a university degree (85.1%), with 15.5 percent having a Master's degree, and 69.3 percent having a College/Bachelor's degree or equivalent. A further 7.4 percent undertook some university studies, but had no qualification, while 6.8 percent completed high school only, and 0.8 percent did not achieve that. Only one person (.2%) had a doctoral degree. Of those who had a degree, 54.2 percent specialized in journalism, 6.5 percent in another communication field, 9.9 percent in both, and 29.4 percent did not specialize in these fields.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The vast majority of our respondents appeared to be in relatively secure employment, with 87.0 percent stating they had a full-time contract. Only 6.1 percent were employed part-time, and 6.3 percent were freelancers. Average years' experience in journalism was 17.00, median was 15 years ($s=12.46$). Most (88.0%) worked for one newsroom, while another 7.0 percent worked for two. Almost one-quarter had other paid jobs, suggesting that a not insignificant minority do need to supplement their income through non-journalistic work. Only one-third (33.5%) belonged to some kind of professional association. Most (62.2%) were generalists. Over one-third (37.8%) worked on a specific beat, of which the economy/business (16.0%), sports (14.0%) and crime/police/the courts/emergency services (9.4%)

were the most common. Rank and file journalists continue to make up the bulk of the workforce, accounting for almost two thirds (65.0%) of respondents. Almost a third (30.1%) were on a daily newspaper, 20.0 percent were on a weekly newspaper, 16 percent were on magazines, 10.8 percent in television, 16.5 percent in radio, and 0.6 percent in news agencies. Only 4.3 percent were in a stand-alone online news outlet, while 85.9 percent also worked on an on-line outlet off an off-line outlet.

Journalistic Roles

Of 18 possible roles journalists might undertake in their jobs, we asked respondents to rate the importance of each role in their work using a 5-point scale, where 1 was unimportant and 5 was extremely important. The highest-rating role was “Report things as they are” (a mean rating of 4.57). Other highly important roles (in descending order) were “Let people express their views” (3.96), “Be a detached observer” (3.95), “Provide analysis of current affairs (3.83), “Provide information people need to make political decisions” (3.54) and “Monitor and scrutinise political leaders” (3.69). As in 2013, journalists saw their main roles as being to report objectively and independently in order to inform citizenry. The least important roles were “Support government policy” (1.37), “Convey a positive image of political leadership” (1.46), “Set the political agenda” (2.42) and “Be an adversary of the government” (2.08). Respondents thus did not see themselves as being necessarily a supporter or opponent of the government. They thought it more important to provide entertainment and relaxation (3.12) and “provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience” (3.27) than to “support national development” (2.63), “motivate people to participate in political activity” (2.72) or even just to “provide advice orientation and direction for daily life” (2.70). Journalists appear to have a strong belief in their role as the fourth estate, but not to the extent of promoting social change. In addition to the question above, respondents were asked to provide answers to the open-ended question: “In your own words, what are the three most important roles of journalism?” More than 500 individual responses were recorded, from succinct one-liners to paragraph-length. By identifying recurrent words and phrases through discourse analysis (and perhaps some presumption), these responses were assigned to one of four categories. The first two categories dominated responses, and comprised:

- (1) Responses which privileged aspects of professionalism or craft in journalism, as in the need to ‘inform, ‘educate’, provide ‘objective/unbiased/non-partisan/balanced’ news coverage, as well as maintaining high standards of writing and reportage. In this respect, journalists were regarded as agents in processes of news gathering and dissemination. Two typical responses were: “Honesty of reporting; communication of the facts; share a balance of opinions”, and “There’s only one; to subjectively report the news in an even-handed manner that allows the reader to make a fully informed decision on any given topic.”
- (2) Responses which argued for journalists as watchdogs or guardians of the public good, in a fourth estate role which held the powerful accountable to their readers, listeners and viewers. In this respect, journalists were regarded as advocates for a greater good. Two typical responses were: “Be the voice – to ask, challenge and explore on the behalf of the public from a position of independence; tell the story – to inform, detail and explain to that public from a position of integrity; be the record – to chronicle the important, interesting and noteworthy from a position of authority,” and “keeping check

on power – holding government, business and other influencers to account, and defending the media’s freedom to do so.”

- (3) Responses which incorporated both of the above two roles, as in “inform; entertain; hold people accountable or hold power to account; inform; entertain.”
- (4) Two other roles, which were cited by a small number of journalists, which pointed to the need for news organisations to be profitable, and specific cultural agendas as in, “deliver the information/news in simple language, easy to understand. In my case, translate the news accurately in Samoan to inform our listeners in their language.”

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	532	94.0	4.57	.64
Let people express their views	526	71.5	3.96	.98
Be a detached observer	530	71.5	3.95	.99
Provide analysis of current affairs	526	67.9	3.83	1.02
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	521	61.6	3.69	1.30
Provide information people need to make political decisions	527	61.1	3.54	1.29
Monitor and scrutinize business	523	57.6	3.60	1.26
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	527	43.5	3.27	1.19
Advocate for social change	521	39.0	3.07	1.25
Provide entertainment and relaxation	530	36.6	3.12	1.15
Motivate people to participate in political activity	518	31.3	2.72	1.34
Influence public opinion	515	27.8	2.80	1.22
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	522	26.1	2.70	1.24
Support national development	502	24.5	2.63	1.23
Set the political agenda	506	18.2	2.42	1.18
Be an adversary of the government	494	11.9	2.08	1.15
Convey a positive image of political leadership	513	3.5	1.46	.80
Support government policy	504	1.4	1.37	.70

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

Most journalists believed they should adhere to professional norms; almost all respondents (96.1%) agreed with the statement, “Journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context.” Within this broad agreement, however, there were nuances; 59.2 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, “What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation”, while a third disagreed. Rank and file journalists (mean 3.40) were more likely to agree with this statement ($F=4.82$, $df=2$, $p<.01$) than senior managers (mean 2.95). 38.1 percent (2013: 40%) agreed with the statement, “What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment”, (while 52 percent disagree), with rank and file again being more likely to agree (mean 2.81) than junior management (mean 2.30), ($F=7.045$, $df=2$, $p<.001$). Almost the same proportion (33.7%) agreed that, “It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it.” While almost half (48%) disagree with this statement. This suggests that rank and file journalists are less rigid about some of these ethical issues than their managers. There were no significant gender differences in the responses.

We listed ten common journalistic practices that involved an ethical dimension and asked respondents whether they could be justified in obtaining an important story, with 1 being always justified, 2 justified on occasion, and 3 being never justified. The most acceptable practices were “Using confidential business or government

documents without authorisation” (mean rating 2.07), “Using hidden microphones or cameras” (2.23), “Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors” (2.28).

It appears that New Zealand journalists are usually comfortable with deceptive and intrusive practices in order to gain information, but are not when it comes to publishing (dramatization by actors is not counted here as a deceptive dissemination practice, because viewers are usually alerted to the use of actors). This suggests journalists see a clear distinction between newsgathering and news dissemination, and by inference, that they back themselves to make ethical judgements about when to disseminate information gained through deception.

However, they are also much divided about the acceptability of some newsgathering practices. In particular, about half think it acceptable to use personal information without permission, on occasion, whereas half think it never justified. This is one practice which appears to be causing journalists some conflict. We think this is most likely due to the increasing pressure from news organisations on journalists to use and access public social media accounts for stories.

Likewise, a majority or more of journalists think it never justified to exert pressure on sources for a story, pretend to be someone else, pay for information, publish unverified content or accept money. One said, in relation to whether they had exerted pressure on unwilling informants, “I have certainly talked people around when they've had doubts about participating in a story but I have never threatened, blackmailed or bribed anybody.” Another said: “Talking someone into a story despite their objections is a matter of degree. If it crosses the line into bullying, then no. They must always know they have the choice not to give information.”

The acceptability of using unverified content seems to depend on what journalists thought it meant. As one said, it is fine if verification is taken in the strict sense, as meaning content that is not attached to a named source: “On occasion, I have been instructed to use the word that my paper ‘understands’ that such a situation is the case. That is only done when you know a fact to be true, but you cannot get someone to be quoted on the record. I have hardly ever had a complaint after using the phrase ‘understands’ for content that cannot be independently verified.”

The ranking of acceptability of these practices remained very similar between 2013 and 2015. By far the most unacceptable practice remains accepting money from sources.

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	534	96.1	4.64	.65
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	530	59.2	3.24	1.41
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	533	38.1	2.63	1.36
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	522	33.7	2.63	1.35

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	517	10.1	73.3
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	476	3.4	65.8
Using hidden microphones or cameras	514	1.8	73.2
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	507	1.6	45.6
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	491	1.2	49.3
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	510	.8	48.8
Paying people for confidential information	499	.4	35.3
Claiming to be somebody else	514	.2	25.7
Publishing stories with unverified content	517	.0	23.4
Accepting money from sources	514	.0	1.9

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 New Zealand reported a high degree of professional autonomy. More than three quarters (78.6%) say they have complete or a great deal of freedom in their selection of stories. Virtually the same number (78.2%) had complete or a great deal of freedom in deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story. A majority of journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) "always" or "very often" (58.3%).

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying "extremely" and "very influential"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	513	82.1	4.17	.86
Time limits	514	70.0	3.87	.90
Information access	499	68.5	3.83	.92
Media laws and regulation	505	66.9	3.79	1.05
Availability of news-gathering resources	502	62.4	3.71	.96
Editorial policy	509	54.6	3.54	1.00
Your personal values and beliefs	508	52.0	3.53	1.01
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	495	50.5	3.43	1.02
Relationships with news sources	496	49.6	3.41	1.07
Audience research and data	503	38.8	3.08	1.17
Feedback from the audience	510	34.5	3.19	.93
Your peers on the staff	498	29.5	2.95	1.01
Managers of the news organization	489	28.8	2.81	1.17
Competing news organizations	497	26.6	2.89	.97
Censorship	449	25.2	2.51	1.30
Owners of the news organization	462	16.9	2.21	1.24
Profit expectations	457	14.7	2.21	1.22
Friends, acquaintances and family	495	12.7	2.43	1.01
Advertising considerations	468	12.6	2.15	1.14
Colleagues in other media	495	12.3	2.48	.97
Government officials	475	11.6	2.08	1.09
Public relations	496	11.1	2.26	1.04
Business people	478	9.6	2.09	1.05
Politicians	470	8.7	1.96	1.05
Pressure groups	476	5.0	1.93	.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.

Unsurprisingly, given the strong adherence to journalistic codes of ethics noted above, the strongest influence was “Journalism ethics” (with a mean rating of 4.17). This was followed by “Time limits” (3.87) “Information access” (3.83), “Media laws and regulation” (3.79), and “Availability of newsgathering resources” (3.71). Since 2013, time limits (ranked fourth then) have become significantly more pressing. As in 2013, among the perceived influences ranking lower in the journalists’ views was “Pressure groups” (1.93), “Owners” and “Profit expectations” (2.21).

Journalism in Transition

The dramatic changes in news brought about by the switch to digital dissemination and the rise of social media are reflected in journalists’ perceptions of change in their industry. “Social media, such as Facebook or Twitter” strengthened the most, with a mean rating of 4.80, followed by “the use of search engines” (4.63), “user-generated content, such as blogs” (4.40), “profit-making pressures” (4.35), “advertising pressures” (4.07) and working hours (4.03). There are significant shifts from 2013 – while the ranking of the top three change elements is the same, the amount of perceived change has strengthened. Also, advertising pressures and working hours have now entered the top five, replacing “The importance of technical skills” (4.0) and “audience feedback” (also 4.0).

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has “increased”	Percentage saying has “decreased”
The use of search engines	392	97.7	.0
Average working hours of journalists	369	80.2	2.4
Technical skills	386	79.5	10.6
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	384	63.5	23.2
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	335	56.1	7.8
Having a university degree	324	54.6	6.8
The relevance of journalism for society	388	30.7	35.8
Journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions	369	22.5	46.3
The credibility of journalism	389	9.0	67.9
Time available for researching stories	387	4.4	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 New Zealand. 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	391	99.0	.3
User-generated contents, such as blogs	387	92.5	1.3
Profit making pressures	383	89.3	1.0
Audience feedback	388	83.8	3.6
Pressure toward sensational news	381	81.1	1.8
Audience involvement in news production	380	80.5	1.1
Audience research	371	80.3	2.7
Advertising considerations	373	79.9	2.4
Competition	384	77.6	13.5
Public relations	385	72.5	3.4
Journalism education	328	34.5	43.3
Ethical standards	369	15.2	60.4

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



The increasing commercial pressures on journalists also showed in those elements identified by respondents as having weakened the most. These were “time available for researching stories” (1.76), “the credibility of journalism” (2.25), “ethical standards” (2.4), and “journalists’ freedom to make editorial decisions” (2.69). Clearly, then, journalists are feeling keenly the impact of new media and straitened times on their work practices.

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

Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	3000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	-
<i>Sample size:</i>	539 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	online
<i>Response rate:</i>	23%
<i>Period of field research:</i>	11/2015-12/2015