

## A longitudinal analysis from 2008 to 2023: What you always wanted to know about journalists in Switzerland

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### Abstract

The article provides a comprehensive overview of journalists in Switzerland based on the most recent wave of the Worlds of Journalism (WoJ) survey conducted in 2023. The study investigates the demographics, working conditions, role perceptions, and safety concerns of Swiss journalists. Building on past survey waves from 2008 and 2015, this study extends the analysis to 1179 journalists across all three language regions. The findings highlight trends, including an increase in female journalists and higher levels of academic qualifications. Notably, the study also identifies persistent challenges, including gender disparities in management roles and specific journalistic beats, increasing economic pressures, the growth of part-time work, and declining job satisfaction. Additionally, the article addresses the risks journalists face, including workplace bullying and threats, which influence their likelihood of remaining in or endorsing the profession. This research underscores the importance of understanding the evolving professional landscape of journalism, informing both academic discourse and practical measures to support the industry.

### Keywords

diversity, journalism studies, journalistic profession, precarization, survey, Switzerland

## 1 Introduction

Press freedom is facing mounting global challenges amid crises, wars, and authoritarianism (Reporter ohne Grenzen, 2024). In countries like Russia and Turkey, repression of journalists is rising, and even in Germany, reporters face growing hostility. In Switzerland, the situation is comparatively positive, but issues such as banking secrecy and inconsistent transparency laws still restrict journalistic work. Recent studies also highlight mounting pressures from digital transformation, economic instability, declining professionalism, political polarization, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bundesamt für Kommunikation, 2024; fög, 2023, 2025). A resilient form of journalism that ensures the safety of media professionals is crucial for a free society and the functioning of democracy (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023; Høiby & Ottosen, 2019). For this reason, studies of the occupational field have become even more

relevant to recognizing developments and shortcomings at an early stage.

Studies on journalists and their working conditions have been conducted regularly around the world for decades (Weaver & Willnat, 2012). The topic was investigated in Switzerland in 1980 (Saxer & Schanne, 1981), 1998 (Marr et al., 2001), 2008 (Bonfadelli et al., 2011; Keel, 2011), and 2015 (Dingerkus et al., 2018). Since 2007, Switzerland has participated in the “Worlds of Journalism” (WoJ) project (Hanitzsch & Seethaler, 2009), a comprehensive global survey that is expected to cover 75 countries in its latest edition. In the first WoJ study from 2008, 100 journalists from German-speaking Switzerland were interviewed. The second wave, conducted in 2015, expanded to include 909 journalists from all three language regions. The present study is based on the findings from the most recent, third wave of data collection for WoJ, which was completed in the fall of 2023.



The research questions remain consistent with those of the 2015 study: Who constitutes the journalist community in Switzerland? What features characterize their daily professional routines? How do they perceive the roles and influences that shape their work? And how have these aspects changed over time?

Additionally, for the first time in the WoJ project, questions about journalists' safety were included. These questions are used to examine which journalists are most at risk from various threats and whether these threats affect the likelihood that they will recommend the profession to others.

The research framework was developed during earlier survey waves and has been continuously reviewed and adapted to reflect changes in the field (Lauerer & Hanitzsch, 2019). It defines mandatory rules and standards for all key stages of the research process, including the target population, sampling procedure, and data consolidation. All countries participating in the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS) use a commonly agreed-upon questionnaire that combines mandatory core items with optional modules. As the survey in Switzerland is part of the broader study of WoJ, the questionnaire was largely developed in collaboration with other participants from the DACH region (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland), ensuring cross-country comparability. Attention was also paid to ensure comparability with WoJ surveys from previous years (2008, 2015), allowing for a longitudinal analysis. However, full comparability is not guaranteed because the wording of questions can differ slightly across survey waves. Finally, to ensure comparability between different language regions in Switzerland, researchers from French-speaking and Italian-speaking Switzerland were involved.

The subsequent sections detail the relevant methodological aspects, followed by a presentation of the survey results. Finally, in the concluding section, we draw several conclusions for Swiss journalists in 2023. While this research does not comprehensively demonstrate the evolving landscape of journalism, the findings offer valuable insights into the state of journalism in Switzerland.

## 2 Methodology and sample

The study follows established survey practices used in comparative journalism research (e.g., Hanitzsch et al., 2019). The design is aligned with the international WoJ framework while being adapted to the Swiss context, ensuring continuity with previous survey waves. In 2023, a sample of roughly 1200 journalists from all three language regions of Switzerland was drawn. The journalists were divided according to language region and media type, as in 2015 (Dingerkus et al., 2018), and then a random sample was drawn.

In a first step, the population of media companies in Switzerland was compiled. For this purpose, data from the WEMF research institute and the Renteria media database served as the basis; experts in the online media landscape, such as Mathias Künzler, were also consulted to complete the list (Künzler, 2022). Special interest journals (like trade media) were excluded because the project's core criteria are broad accessibility, covering a wide range of topics, and independent management. Smaller media titles with low reach (fewer than 5000 copies in circulation and small editorial teams) were omitted. The list was further supplemented with additional titles that were missing in the lists used.

According to the Federal Statistical Office (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2024a), around 9876 journalists worked in the Swiss media industry in 2022. Ten years earlier, in 2012, the Federal Statistical Office counted 12224 journalists. This represents a loss of about 19% or 2348 journalists over 10 years. However, as mentioned in previous studies (Dingerkus et al., 2018), such numbers should be treated with great caution. The definition of who qualifies as a journalist and the methods for systematically counting them have become increasingly unclear over time, especially amid digitalization (Loosen, 2015). Although the exact figures are unknown, a reduction in the number of journalists in the traditional sense can be assumed. This assumption is based on the fact that, in recent years, there has been a decline in independent newspaper titles and in newsroom staffing at the remaining newspapers (Lucht, 2010).

In-depth research, including consultations with industry associations and a review

of media outlets' mastheads, suggests that the actual number of journalists in 2023 is around 9 000 – lower than the Federal Statistical Office's estimate for 2022. Approximately 600 journalists work for online-only media, 450 for private radio stations, 400 for private TV stations, 950 for magazines, 3 250 for print media, and 3 350 for the *Schweizerische Radio- und Fernsehgesellschaft (SRG)*, Switzerland's public broadcaster. These figures also include freelance journalists, though it should be borne in mind that estimating the number of freelancers is particularly difficult, as they are rarely registered with media companies and are therefore largely unorganized. Additionally, this is a highly volatile group with significant staff turnover. From a scientific perspective, it is hard to define the boundaries of freelance activities. In this case, they were treated as equal to employed journalists, defined by the time spent on their journalistic activities.

Based on the estimated number of journalists working in each media type, a stratified sample was drawn from the list, accounting for the size and location of the media outlets. This proportional allocation ensured that each category was represented in line with its relative weight in the overall journalistic workforce.

In a further step, the journalists' names and email addresses were collected from the online imprints of the media organizations in which they work. This procedure was possible for many private media outlets and for a total of around 50% of the final sample. For some outlets and the public broadcaster, a randomized selection of journalists was conducted by the outlets themselves due to the lack of accessible lists of employed journalists. The editors-in-chief of the most important media were contacted personally to obtain their consent to interview their staff members.

A total of approximately 2 400 emails were sent to individual journalists and editors-in-chief in German-speaking Switzerland, 755 in the French-speaking part, and 200 in the Italian-speaking part. A few days later, a reminder was sent to every journalist in the sample. Two weeks later, a second reminder was distributed, after which non-respondents were replaced with a new batch of randomly selected journalists from the same outlet. If

the required minimum of three journalists per medium could not be met, these media outlets were excluded and replaced with another randomly selected medium of the same type and size. The response rate in Switzerland was 25%.

In addition, the selected journalists had to fulfill the criterion set out in the WoJ guideline that they work at least 50% in journalism (i. e., either earn at least 50% of their salary or spend at least 50% of their working time on journalistic work) to participate in the survey.

As in 2015, the survey was conducted in accordance with the guidelines established by the WoJ project. Using a multi-layered analytical model (Reese, 2001; Weischenberg & Scholl, 1998), the questionnaire was designed to incorporate both organizational and societal contextual factors, acknowledging the crucial role journalists play within their organizations and society. Nevertheless, given the questionnaire-based methodology, all information gathered still originated from individual journalists themselves.

Certain questions and/or answers from the basic WoJ questionnaire have been adapted to local circumstances to fit into the Swiss context. Highly relevant questions for Switzerland have been added. To ensure that the answers from the present study are not only comparable with those from the 2015 survey but also, if possible, with those from 2008, particular attention was paid to the wording of the questions.

As far as the comparability of the three surveys (2008, 2015, 2023) is concerned, it should be noted that the sampling procedures were almost identical but differed slightly. In 2008, a portion of the survey sample was selected from membership lists of professional journalism organizations and trade unions such as Impressum, while others were identified through outreach to editors-in-chief of radio and television stations. In 2015, journalists were increasingly contacted via their respective editorial offices (227 e-mails were sent to editors-in-chief), asking them to forward it to the journalists. However, membership lists were also used. In 2023, the journalists were contacted via the online imprints of their news organizations and via emails to the editors-in-chief, as described above. These differences in the sampling method may result in

Table 1: Comparison of the samples of the 2008, 2015, and 2023 surveys (percentages)

	Survey 2008 <i>N</i> =2509	Survey 2015 <i>N</i> =909	Survey 2023 <i>N</i> =1179	German		French		Italian	
				2015 <i>N</i> =660	2023 <i>N</i> =848	2015 <i>N</i> =176	2023 <i>N</i> =244	2015 <i>N</i> =73	2023 <i>N</i> =87
				72.6%	71.9%	19.4%	20.7%	8.0%	7.4%
Gender									
Female	35.2	38.5	43.6	40.5	41.4	36.4	48.4	26.0	51.2
Age									
Up to 34	26.4	32.0	28.9	33.8	29.9	28.2	31.0	23.6	14.1
35 to 44	31.5	28.7	27.7	28.3	26.9	29.4	31.0	30.9	25.9
45 and older	42.1	39.3	43.5	37.9	43.2	42.4	38.1	45.5	60.0
Employment									
Freelancer	18.8	7.7	4.5	9.7	5.1	2.3	3.7	2.7	1.2
Trainee	11.2	5.1	1.2	4.9	1.2	6.3	1.7	4.2	0.0

the most recent sample including more active journalists and fewer freelancers, though the variation is likely not very large.

The survey sample of the latest wave of WoJ, comprising 1179 participants, exhibits a high degree of diversity in the representation of different language regions. It is possibly the most diverse sample ever examined in a Swiss journalist survey.

### 3 Results

In this section, the survey's general results are presented and discussed. Furthermore, where an aspect of the survey allows for a meaningful breakdown into various sub-groups, a more detailed look at the data is presented.

#### 3.1 Five basic characteristics: Gender, age, education, background, and political self-positioning

To obtain a comprehensive overview of Swiss journalists, this study first presents five socio-economic variables that are unrelated to journalism itself: gender, age, education, political self-positioning, and origin.

*Gender:* The proportion of women among journalists increased from 39% in 2015 to

43.6% in 2023 (similar figures reported by the Bundesamt für Statistik, 2024a). This represents a continuation of the trend toward greater inclusion of women in journalism and could indicate that broader debates on diversity and inclusion have gained importance in newsrooms over the past decade (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2021; Saner, Körner & Lugschitz, 2024). In 1980, only around 17% of Swiss journalists were female (Saxer & Schanne, 1981). Compared to the figures from 2015 (Table 1), the proportion of women has increased, especially in French-speaking (now 48.4%) and Italian-speaking Switzerland (now 51.2%). While this may reflect real shifts in newsroom composition, the small sample size in the Italian subgroup (*N*=87) suggests that these percentages should be interpreted with caution.

The above-average increase in the proportion of women in French-speaking Switzerland and Ticino can also be explained by the fact that the 2023 survey includes more employees from public media than in 2015. The public media tend to place greater emphasis on diversity than private media and could therefore hire women more frequently (Saner & Wyss, 2023; SRG, 2024). In 2015, 11% of surveyed journalists from French-speaking Switzerland were included in the sample from

**Table 2: Comparison of Educational Attainment in the 2015 and 2023 Samples (percentages)**

	Total		German-speaking Switzerland		French-speaking Switzerland		Italian-speaking Switzerland	
	2015	2023	2015	2023	2015	2023	2015	2023
	N=871	N=1080	N=625	N=772	N=173	N=223	N=73	N=85
Not completed high school	9.1	5.3	10.4	6.3	6.9	3.1	2.7	1.2
Completed high school	10.9	8.3	12.3	9.3	5.2	5.4	12.3	7.1
College/bachelor's degree or equivalent	24.0	27.6	25.6	33.0	21.4	11.7	16.4	20.0
Master's degree or equivalent	42.3	48.6	37.0	40.9	56.1	69.5	54.8	63.5
Doctorate	3.3	3.8	3.8	4.3	1.7	2.7	2.7	2.4
Some university studies, no degree	10.4	6.4	10.9	6.1	8.7	7.6	11.0	5.9

public media (Dingerkus et al., 2018), a figure that rose to 25% by 2023. Among journalists from the Italian-speaking region, 25% were included in the sample from public media in 2015, rising to 69% in 2023.

Yet the data also show that women are still less often represented in management positions than men (9.5% compared to 16.0% of men;  $\chi^2(2) = 24.54, p < .001$ ). However, factors such as working hours (full-time, part-time) or work experience must be considered. 63% of women work part-time compared to 39.8% of men ( $\chi^2(1) = 57.27, p < .001$ ). On average, women have about 4 years less work experience than men ( $t(1054.26) = -5.89, p < .001$ ).

In addition, journalists were asked for the first time in 2023 whether they identify with a third gender and, if so, which one. Only 3 journalists made use of this option.

**Age:** Swiss journalists are on average 42.9 years old. This number corresponds to the figures from 2008, where the average age was 43 years, but is slightly higher than in 2015, where it was 41.6 years (Dingerkus et al., 2018). While there are no differences in average age across the three language regions, women are, on average, 4 years younger than men (*Mann-Whitney U* = 168506.00,  $p < .001$ ). The trend towards greater inclusion of women in journalism seems reflected in age structures: among those aged 20 to 29, 60% are

women, and among those aged 30 to 39, 47.8% are women. However, this pattern may also be related to gender-specific career trajectories, as women in journalism are more often affected by precarious employment conditions, which may interact with work-family challenges in early and mid-career stages (Rick & Hanitzsch, 2024).

**Education:** In 2015, approximately 70% of journalists in Switzerland held an academic degree (Table 2). In the current sample, this value has further increased to 80%. If the language regions are considered individually, the proportions of people with academic degrees in French-speaking and Italian-speaking Switzerland are 83.9% and 85.9%, respectively, which are higher than in German-speaking Switzerland (78.2%; differences not statistically significant). This is in line with earlier findings: As journalism is an increasingly complex profession, journalists are more likely to attend university (Keel, 2011). In French-speaking Switzerland, and particularly in Ticino, there are more journalists with a master's degree or equivalent.

**Political self-positioning:** Journalists' political attitudes were assessed on a 0–10 scale, where 0 represents left-leaning and 10 represents right-leaning. On average, Swiss journalists score 3.40. This represents a shift to the left compared to the 2015 survey, where the mean score was 4.02 (Dingerkus et al., 2018),

indicating that journalists have become slightly more left-leaning in recent years.

There are differences between the language regions: Journalists in French-speaking Switzerland are more left-leaning (2.99) compared to their German-speaking counterparts (3.48), while those in Ticino (3.77) position themselves more toward the center (*Kruskal-Wallis*  $H(2)=9.76$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Furthermore, there are significant gender differences: women are on average more left-leaning (2.88) than their male counterparts (3.81;  $U=125820.50$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The distribution of the political self-positioning variable further shows that female journalists exhibit a left-skewed (i. e., toward 0) near-normal distribution, whereas male journalists display a bimodal pattern.

As in 2015, the findings on journalists' political self-positioning will certainly stimulate political debate about journalists' left-wing bias. However, the trend towards the left pole must be interpreted with caution. It is important to consider the extent to which political self-positioning actually influences reporting. After all, the *Forschungszentrum Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft* (fög) – a Swiss research center on the public sphere and society – recently demonstrated through a content analysis of journalistic media's political positioning during referendums that most media outlets, including public broadcasters, tend to position themselves neither at the left nor right pole of the political spectrum, but rather close to the center (Udris, 2023). While U.S. studies have produced mixed findings on whether journalists' individual ideologies measurably contribute to ideological bias in news content – some finding evidence of such effects (e. g., Boxell & Conway, 2022), others not (e. g., Hassell, Holbein, & Miles, 2020) – further research in the Swiss context is needed.

*Origin:* In 2023, 87.4% of journalists reported being born in Switzerland, while 12.6% were born abroad. Among the foreign-born journalists, the majority were born in Germany (30.2%), France (22.1%), and Italy (14.7%). Regarding their parents' place of birth, 66.8% of journalists indicated that both parents were born in Switzerland, 18.6% had one parent born abroad, and 14.6% had both parents born abroad.

The implications of these data for the representation of foreigners in Swiss journalism are unclear. Previous WoJ survey data cannot

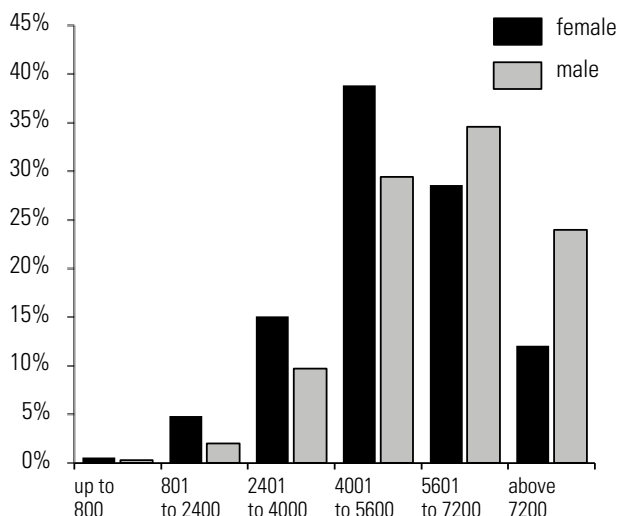
be directly compared with the 2023 figures because the questions about journalists' origins differ. The wording of the item was revised in 2023 to better align with current research in journalism, which considers social origin a more meaningful indicator than formal citizenship. Due to constraints on questionnaire length, the citizenship item was not retained. In 2015, the survey asked about citizenship, revealing that 17% of journalists did not hold Swiss citizenship, while 24% of foreigners lived in Switzerland (Dingerkus et al., 2018). The conclusion was that foreigners are still underrepresented in journalism. However, the 2023 figures only indicate the journalists' birthplaces and do not reveal whether they hold Swiss citizenship.

### 3.2 Working situation

The media industry is undergoing a profound structural transformation driven by digitalization and the decline of traditional revenue streams, leading to significant economic pressure (Bundesamt für Kommunikation, 2024; Wyss, 2012). Traditional news outlets are simultaneously losing subscribers, while willingness to pay for journalism continues to decline (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023; Udris et al., 2024). The deteriorating economic situation is accompanied by deteriorating working conditions, as reflected in a higher proportion of part-time and temporary employment. Studies among young journalists show that a lack of resources leads to workplace stress and growing pessimism regarding long-term career prospects (Mombelli & Beck, 2023).

*Employment arrangement:* Compared to 2015, when only 6% of journalists worked in temporary conditions (Dingerkus et al., 2018), the percentage of journalists who work in temporary conditions has risen to 23.1% in 2023, with women working more often in such conditions than men (26.7% compared to 20.0% of men;  $\chi^2(2)=6.80$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This change could be interpreted as a consequence of the recent negative economic developments in journalism.

*Workload:* There has also been a decline in the number of full-time journalists. In 2015, 57% of journalists worked full-time, but in 2023, that number fell to 50.3%. However, only 6.2% of part-time working journalists say they work under these conditions because they

Figure 1: Salary classes by gender (non-leadership positions,  $N=682$ )

have not found a suitable full-time position. For comparison, 89% of journalists in Germany work full-time (Loosen et al., 2023), while the figure in Austria is about 70% (Mitterstainer et al., 2023). As mentioned, women work significantly more often in part-time positions than men.

*Salaries:* Another aspect of economics to consider is salaries. In a deteriorating work environment, one would expect salaries to decline. The WoJ survey from 2015 showed that wages in journalism have remained stable over time (Dingerkus et al., 2018). Unfortunately, comparison with today's data is not possible because measurements were taken on different scales. In contrast to the individualized scale used in 2015, the current scale is closely based on the international questionnaire and employs different response categories, which prevents direct comparison. Journalists' salaries can, however, be compared to the mean wage in Switzerland. In 2022, the median standardized monthly income in Switzerland was 6 788 Swiss francs (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2024b). The 2023 WoJ data reveal that roughly 42% of journalists earned less than 5 601 Swiss francs, while 32% earned between 5 601 and 7 200 Swiss francs.

A gender pay gap persists: women are more likely to work in lower wage brackets, while men are more often found in higher wage brackets ( $\chi^2(9)=65.35$ ,  $p<.001$ ). This

also applies when comparing only journalists without leadership roles (Figure 1). Comparable gender pay differences are documented at the national level. Part of the gap is associated with differences in profiles and job characteristics, yet a disparity remains even after controlling for these factors (Der Bundesrat, 2025). Similar structural differences are visible in our data (see chapter 3.1) and should be considered when interpreting the reported gender differences in wage distribution.

*Media type:* While in 2015 journalists were asked what type of media they worked for (print, TV, radio, etc.), this question is less meaningful and harder to answer in 2023, as journalists increasingly produce content for multiple platforms simultaneously. They were therefore asked how often they work on the listed platforms, using a five-point scale ranging from 1 ("never") to 5 ("always"). The data shows the increasing demands on journalism to expand its capacities online. On average, journalists produce significantly more often for websites than for the classic print platforms ( $t(977)=-21.44$ ,  $p<.001$ ), TV ( $t(959)=-26.97$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and radio ( $t(965)=-27.42$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

### 3.3 Editorial organization

Traditionally, newsrooms have organized themselves around topics or beats such as economics, sports, or culture, enabling jour-

nalists to specialize within their respective fields; in 2011, around 71% of Swiss journalists were assigned to one section (Bonfadelli et al., 2011). However, this organizational approach is increasingly challenged as newsroom resources shrink, compelling journalists to cover a wider range of subjects (Lauerer et al., 2019). Conversely, emerging convergent newsroom structures are redirecting organizational focus from outlet-specific frameworks towards prioritizing topics or issues.

Interestingly, although the proportion of journalists specializing in one beat has declined since 2011, it remains identical in 2023 to the level observed in 2015 (Dingerkus et al., 2018): about 48% focus exclusively on one beat, while a slightly larger group (52%) covers a range of topics. In 2023, male journalists are significantly more likely than female journalists to focus exclusively on one beat (51% compared to 43% of women;  $\chi^2(1) = 7.10, p < .01$ ). Also, in both 2015 and 2023, a bias has been observed in the topics covered by female and male journalists. The following percentages indicate the distribution of men and women within each beat. Men remain overrepresented in topics such as politics (66.1% male), economics (73.0% male), or domestic affairs (73.3% male). In contrast, women are more commonly found reporting on topics like arts and culture (46.7% female), education and science (63.0% female), or society and social matters (83.3% female). Women are most underrepresented in the field of sports, accounting for only 5.9%, whereas men represent 94.1% of journalists in this beat.

### 3.4 Role perception

In journalism studies, it's widely accepted that a journalist's understanding of their societal role influences their work (Weischenberg, 1994). Thus, exploring how journalists see themselves is important. Although it's uncertain whether journalists can completely fulfill this role, the findings provide insight into the ideal self-conception and societal role of journalism.

In a U.S. study, it was observed that journalists' role perceptions are generally stable over time (Weaver, 2008). Recent WoJ data from Switzerland align with this, indicating consistent importance rankings comparable to those in earlier surveys, with a few excep-

tions, as shown in Table 3. All role perceptions were measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 ("not important") to 5 ("extremely important"). Compared to 2015, journalists identify more strongly with the role of educating their audiences (+0.38) and conveying a positive image of political leadership (+0.07). They identify less strongly with the roles of being a detached observer (-0.09), providing analysis of current affairs (-0.11), letting people express their views (-0.11), providing entertainment and relaxation (-0.24), influencing public opinion (-0.24), and setting the political agenda (-0.35).

Some roles were asked for the first time in 2023 or in a new formulation (marked with an asterisk \* in Table 3), which makes them incomparable with similar questions asked in 2015. Important roles seem to be communicating information that enables people to form opinions (mean value of 4.32), counteract disinformation (4.12), shedding light on social injustices (3.88), demonstrating future impacts of current events (3.72), and telling stories that touch people emotionally (3.57). A look at the role types shows that journalists in Switzerland identify particularly with critical-monitoring roles – emphasizing scrutiny of power and public accountability – and least with interventionist roles, which involve actively influencing political processes (see Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Hanitzsch et al., 2019).

### 3.5 Perception of influence

Journalism resides at the heart of society, responding to the demands and expectations of various stakeholder groups (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023). To understand the needs, expectations, and interests that shape and influence journalists' work, journalists were asked to evaluate the importance of 27 potential sources of influence.

Compared with 2015 (Dingerkus et al., 2018), some influences have changed markedly, while others have remained relatively stable (Table 4). All influences were measured on a five-point scale from 1 ("least influential") to 5 ("very influential"). Internally, the influence of editorial supervisors and senior editors (+0.25) and colleagues have greatly increased (+0.25). According to the surveyed journalists, profit expectations have stayed the same, and advertising considerations are

**Table 3: Perceived importance of selected journalistic roles (1 = not important to 5 = extremely important; *N* = 1087–1175)**

	Very and extremely important (in percentage)	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Role type
Communicate information that enables people to form opinions*	85.5	4.32 (0.86)	
Be a detached observer	79.3	4.17 (0.95) ↘**	
Counteract disinformation*	77.8	4.12 (0.96)	
Provide analysis of current affairs	77.5	4.10 (0.92) ↘	
Shedding light on social injustices*	70.3	3.88 (0.98)	Critical-monitoring
Demonstrate future impacts of current events*	65.3	3.72 (0.94)	
Point out possible solutions to social problems*	53.8	3.49 (0.98)	
Control the powerful*	55.1	3.44 (1.24)	
Motivate people to participate in political activity	41.0	3.14 (1.14) =	
Tell stories that touch the audience emotionally*	57.3	3.57 (1.04)	
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	49.5	3.41 (1.06) =	Accommodative
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	43.5	3.25 (1.09) =	
Provide entertainment and relaxation	31.7	2.89 (1.16) ↘	
Educate the audience	53.4	3.49 (1.01) ↗	Educative
Let people express their views	50.5	3.43 (1.02) ↘	
Contribute to social cohesion*	45.8	3.31 (1.07)	
Giving marginalized groups and minorities a voice*	40.3	3.23 (1.05)	Participative-activist
Promote peace and tolerance*	32.6	3.02 (1.10)	
Advocate for social change	20.8	2.58 (1.11) =	
Support efforts to protect public health*	21.3	2.58 (1.09)	
Support national development	13.0	2.31 (1.03) =	
Support government policy	1.7	1.47 (0.72) =	Collaborative
Convey a positive image of political leadership	1.2	1.36 (0.67) ↗	
Influence public opinion	11.6	2.28 (1.03) ↘	Interventionist
Set the political agenda	11.4	2.24 (1.03) ↘	

Note: \*Asked for the first time. \*\*The arrow-signs indicate a statistically significant difference between 2015 and 2023 (calculated using a t-test), the equal-sign indicates no significant difference.

**Table 4: Mean assessment of the perceived relevance of sources of influence (N = 1022–1132)**

	Factors rated as influential or very influential (%)	Mean value (sd)
Journalism ethics	78.8	4.03 (0.89) ↗
Personal values and beliefs	46.9	3.31 (1.04) ↘
Editorial policy	41.0	3.16 (1.11) ↗
Relationships with news sources	27.1	2.77 (1.09) ↘
Media laws and regulation	27.6	2.72 (1.15) =
Audience research and data	24.3	2.66 (1.14) ↗
Public relations	8.7	2.14 (0.97) ↘
Police	4.2	1.56 (0.85) ↘
Time limits	62.0	3.71 (0.93) ↗
Availability of news-gathering resources	59.2	3.61 (1.01) ↗
Information access	45.6	3.21 (1.10) ↘
Editorial supervisors and senior editors	39.8	3.18 (1.02) ↗
Peers on the staff	34.2	3.07 (0.95) ↗
Managers of your news organization	13.0	2.19 (1.07) =
Owners of your news organization	8.9	1.92 (1.05) =
Feedback from the audience	21.8	2.79 (0.95) ↗
Competing news organizations	16.1	2.54 (0.99) =
Friends, acquaintances and family	9.0	2.18 (0.94) ↘
Colleagues in other media	5.2	2.07 (0.90) ↘
Profit expectations	13.2	2.06 (1.13) =
Advertising considerations	9.5	1.84 (1.03) ↘
Politicians	8.2	1.99 (0.99) ↗
Pressure groups	6.3	2.03 (0.93) =
Businesspeople	5.2	1.82 (0.92) =
Government officials	5.1	1.74 (0.89) =
Self-censorship*	7.9	2.10 (0.95)
State-imposed censorship*	2.3	1.31 (0.66)

Note: Ratings range from 1 (*least influential*) to 5 (*very influential*). Items marked with \* were asked for the first time. Arrow symbols indicate a statistically significant difference between 2015 and 2023 (t-test); the equal sign (=) indicates no statistically significant difference.

becoming less important (–0.13). Politicians (+0.12), journalistic ethics (+0.35), audience research (+0.21), and audience feedback (+0.25) also seem to be more important.

The increasing importance of internal stakeholders and audience research reflects the rising economic pressure in the industry and could indicate a shift towards market-oriented decisions under increasingly precarious conditions, potentially reducing the focus on public-interest orientations (Wyss, 2012; Rick & Hanitzsch, 2024). This is further underlined by the fact that the perceived influence of the availability of news-gathering resources is increasing.

The declining influence of advertising considerations may reflect the broader erosion of advertising revenues and the growing pressure on news organizations to diversify their funding models (Bundesamt für Kommunikation, 2025).

### 3.6 Job satisfaction

In 2023, 68.3% of journalists would still recommend their profession to someone in their personal network, representing a 5% decrease compared to 2015 (Dingerkus et al., 2018). This decrease could suggest that the growing challenges in journalism are affecting job satisfaction. However, with 68.3% of journalists still willing to recommend their profession, the level of endorsement remains substantial.

People in trainee programs are the most likely to recommend the profession (87.5%), followed by reporters (76.6%) and section editors (75.3%). Compared with 2015, the approval rate among editors-in-chief declined from 80% to 62.7% in 2023 (Dingerkus et al., 2018). The sharp decline among editors-in-chief is difficult to explain using the current data alone. Possible explanations include the aforementioned economic pressures, the declining safety of journalists in general (Wyss, Schäfer, & Dingerkus, 2024), waves of redundancies, and an increase in legal proceedings (Wyss et al., 2024), all of which may place additional pressure on editorial leadership. There is no significant difference between female and male journalists in their likelihood of recommending the profession.

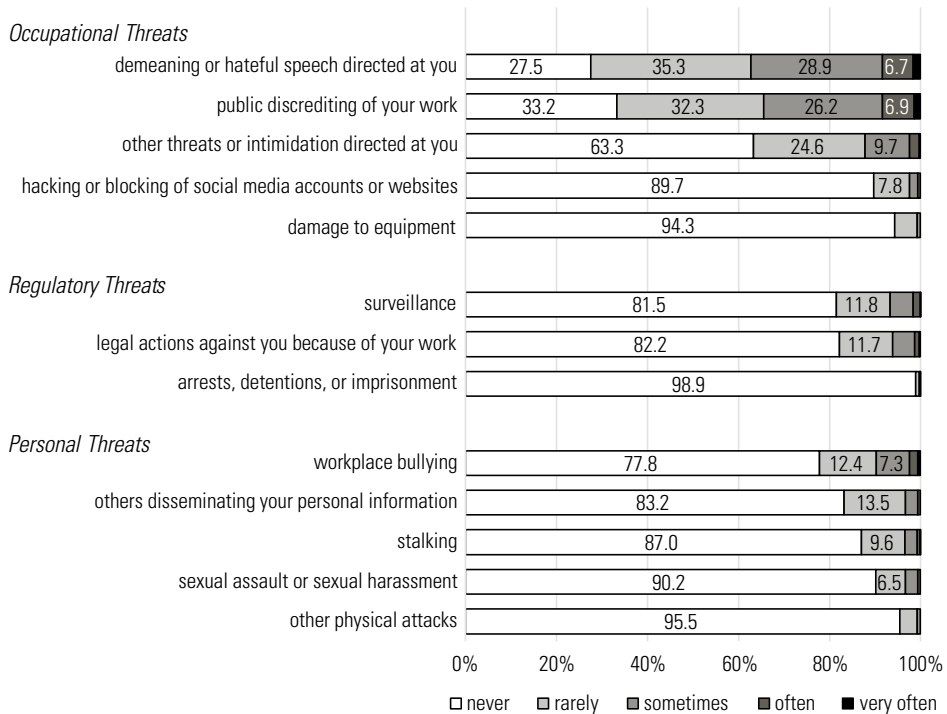
### 3.7 Journalists' safety

As mentioned in the introduction, the third wave of WoJ included several questions about journalists' safety for the first time. The topic is important because press freedom is under increasing pressure worldwide due to crises, wars, and growing authoritarianism (Reporter ohne Grenzen, 2024). Various studies indicate that the environment for journalists in Switzerland has also become more difficult, prompting more comprehensive studies of structural change in the media sector (e.g., Bundesamt für Kommunikation, 2024, 2025; fög, 2023).

In the 2023 WoJ study, safety-related items were grouped into four dimensions for analytical purposes: occupational safety, regulatory threats, personal threats, and perceived worries. Occupational safety refers to hostility or harassment directed at journalists in their professional role (e.g., hateful speech or public discrediting of work), while regulatory safety encompasses risks arising from legal or governmental measures, such as surveillance or legal actions, and personal safety includes threats to physical integrity or privacy. Perceived worries capture journalists' subjective concerns about issues such as mental health or fear of job loss. For all threat-related items, respondents were asked how often they had experienced these incidents in the past five years, using a five-point response scale ranging from 1 ("never") to 5 ("very often").

The results from 2023 show that journalists in Switzerland are particularly at risk with regard to occupational safety (Figure 2). The focus is particularly on demeaning or hateful speech and public discrediting of journalists' work, which 72.5% and 66.8%, respectively, have experienced at least rarely in the last five years. Experiences involving regulatory threats were reported less frequently overall: within the last five years, 81.5% of journalists had never experienced surveillance, 82.2% had never faced legal action because of their work, and 98.9% had never experienced arrests, detention, or imprisonment. Regarding the category "personal threats", 22.2% of journalists reported experiencing workplace bullying at least rarely, 16.8% reported the dissemination of personal information, 13% reported stalking, and 9.8% reported sexual

Figure 2: Safety of Swiss journalists (5=very often, 1=never; N=1154)



harassment or sexual assault. Although threats from the latter categories are less frequent than occupational threats, they nevertheless warrant serious attention. Prior research links both regulatory and personal threats to self-censorship, psychological strain, and withdrawal from journalistic work (e.g., Høiby & Otosen, 2019; Mombelli & Beck, 2023; Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023).

Not all journalists were equally affected by these threats. Journalists in leadership positions reported significantly more cases of “other threats or intimidation” ( $H(2)=9.34, p<.01$ ) and legal measures taken against them ( $H(2)=16.73, p<.001$ ) than those without any leadership role. Gender differences were also observed: Men were significantly more likely to report instances of public discreditation of their work ( $U=159454.50, p<.01$ ), legal measures taken against them due to their journalistic work ( $U=156771.50, p<.001$ ), other threats or intimidation attempts ( $U=158225.50, p<.001$ ), and the dissemination of their personal data by third parties ( $U=151252.00, p<.05$ ). Women, in contrast, were

more likely to report experiences of sexual harassment or assault ( $U=118483.50, p<.001$ ) and workplace bullying ( $U=123704.50, p<.001$ ).

It is worth noting that journalists who experienced workplace bullying ( $U=105655.50, p<.001$ ), demeaning or hateful speech ( $U=105854.50, p<.001$ ), other threats or intimidation directed at them ( $U=104325.00, p<.01$ ), or other physical threats ( $U=97436.00, p<.05$ ) are significantly less likely to recommend their job to others. This suggests that exposure to threatening work environments may be associated with declining professional satisfaction and willingness to recommend the profession.

Considering journalists’ perceived worries, respondents rated their concerns about mental well-being, physical safety, job security, and the punishment of attacks against journalists on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Journalists in Switzerland are most concerned about their mental well-being, with a mean score of 2.76 ( $SD=1.30$ ). In total, 38.7% of re-

spondents stated that they “strongly agree” or “tend to agree” with the statement that they are worried about their mental health. Concern about whether attacks against journalists in Switzerland are adequately punished is also high, with a mean of 2.70 ( $SD=1.27$ ) and 33.8% of respondents agreeing. Worry about physical well-being shows a slightly lower average of 2.27 ( $SD=1.21$ ), with 22.4% indicating concern. The fear of losing one’s job in journalism over the next 12 months is the least prominent, with a mean of 1.98 ( $SD=1.07$ ) and only 12.1% of journalists agreeing.

Journalists reporting worries about their mental well-being ( $U=118444.00, p<.001$ ), the lack of punishment for attacks against journalists ( $U=103279.50, p<.05$ ), their physical well-being ( $U=115571.00, p<.001$ ), and losing their job in journalism ( $U=122109.00, p<.001$ ) are significantly less likely to recommend their profession to others, suggesting that perceived worries may be associated with a lower willingness to recommend the profession.

#### 4 Conclusion

The data presented on the characteristics and attitudes of journalists in Switzerland, as well as their perception of influences and threats, should not be limited to academic discussions, especially from a transdisciplinary perspective (Wyss, 2016). The findings invite reflection within journalism practice, news media organizations, and professional associations. At the same time, when interpreting these results, the growing methodological challenges that journalism research faces in defining its subject matter must be kept in mind. In increasingly differentiated and hybrid professional environments, the presence of peripheral actors – that is, individuals who contribute to journalistic output without being fully embedded in traditional newsroom structures – makes the boundaries of journalism more fluid, complicating efforts to determine a population and draw representative samples (Eldridge II, 2019; Lauerer & Hanitzsch, 2019).

The socio-demographic data and political orientation should be interpreted in the context of ongoing debates about diversity in

journalism. Although there is an increasing presence of women within editorial teams, persistent gender differences in leadership and beat allocation remain visible, echoing findings from other European contexts (e.g., Kaltenbrunner et al., 2021). These patterns raise questions about organizational structures and long-term career trajectories, particularly regarding work-life balance. Additionally, the rising level of academic qualifications and the diverse backgrounds of journalists should be taken into account in these discussions. The authors argue that the pronounced left-leaning orientation of journalists may also be relevant within broader diversity debates, even if such orientations can be contextualized through occupational socialization and professional ideology (see Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018).

The data on working conditions should be examined in light of increasing job precarity in journalism, a trend noted in scholarly discourse since the 2010s (Wyss, 2012). Rising job insecurity, compounded by economic challenges and waves of layoffs, is likely to remain a significant concern, reflected in the growing number of temporary positions and supplementary jobs. The income data further suggest that a substantial portion of journalists in Switzerland earn below the median wage. The increasing convergence and national consolidation of newsrooms, including the centralization of beats, coordinated management of distribution channels, and a strong focus on cost efficiency, require journalists to work across multiple platforms and media formats, thereby contributing to mounting professional pressures. Such conditions may constrain the ability to perform critical journalistic roles, such as countering disinformation, highlighting the future implications of current events, or advocating for solutions-focused journalism. Respondents’ perceptions of declining journalistic autonomy, alongside heightened internal organizational pressures like time constraints and limited resources, align with these findings and highlight the ongoing challenges in the field.

The data on perceived stress and threats faced by journalists is a significant concern – not only from an individual standpoint but also considering the broader social importance of journalism in a direct democracy.

These developments raise important questions about the implications for democratic societies when journalists fear slipping into precarious employment. Observed job losses among peers and potential social decline can result in substantial psychological strain (Bélaïr-Gagnon et al., 2023; Rick & Hanitzsch, 2024). The findings also raise concerns about what can reasonably be expected from journalism when a majority of practitioners face degrading or hateful remarks. The data indicate that not all journalists are equally affected; however, investigative journalists, in particular, encounter significantly higher levels of threats.

Given this context, it is commendable that representatives of the media industry and the Federal Office of Communications (Bundesamt für Kommunikation, 2024) have developed a national action plan for the safety of media professionals in Switzerland. The plan aims to put the issue of “safety for media professionals” on the public agenda, raise awareness of the challenges they face, and sensitize society and politics to the central importance of the media for a functioning democracy in Switzerland.

What do the findings mean for the future of journalism studies? Journalism research has increasingly recognized and begun to examine job insecurity and precarity in the profession (e.g., Mombelli & Beck, 2023; Rick & Hanitzsch, 2024; Sybert, 2024), yet the implications of temporary positions, side jobs, and income disparities for journalistic quality and the ability to maintain professional standards remain insufficiently understood. As recent research shows, these structural constraints are closely linked to journalists’ mental health (e.g., Bélaïr-Gagnon et al., 2023; Storm, 2024), but more research is needed to understand the impact of degrading comments, public discreditation, and psychological stress on journalists’ performance and job retention. Future research must place greater emphasis on these dynamics and evaluate the long-term sustainability and resilience of the profession of journalism.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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