

## Austria

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# Journalism Under Duress

Worlds of Journalism Study Report  
(Wave 3: 2021–2025)



Edited by  
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**WORLDS  
OF  
JOURNALISM**

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## Austria

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Austria has been governed by a coalition of the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Greens. Following the national elections in September 2024, which saw the right-wing Freedom Party emerge victorious with 28.85% of the vote, the Conservatives formed a government with the Social Democrats and the Liberals, which can count on 60% of the seats in parliament. Not least due to extensive state subsidies during the COVID-19 crisis, the economy is weakening, and harsh austerity measures are needed.

A strong public media sector, significant foreign investment, dependence on state support and state advertising, and the vibrant legacy of a long-standing media-party parallelism are among the most defining features of the Austrian media and journalism. Despite or even partly because of these characteristics, a relatively stable media market had developed, which, on the one hand, contributed to strong loyalty among significant sections of the population towards certain large media brands, but on the other hand, only allowed investigative and innovative journalism to emerge in niche areas.

Although television remains the most important source of information, social media platforms have gained in importance since the pandemic. However, the stability mentioned above meant that the effects of these changes in media offerings and media usage were not taken seriously for a long time. As a result, the Austrian media ecosystem is currently undergoing a period of upheaval to which the industry and journalism are responding only slowly.

### BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The Austrian sample comprises 50.7% women and 49.3% men, with a mean age of 47.3 years (SD = 11.0; Median = 48.0). While 28.2% are aged 46–55, only 17.9% are under 35. Austrian journalists show a high level of education: 70.0% hold a university degree – women outperform men on average – and 50.0% possess a master's or equivalent. Furthermore, 85.9% received formal journalism education: 63.0% completed a journalistic apprenticeship, 55.6% attended short-term courses (e.g., workshops and seminars), and 45.8% studied journalism at university. These figures reflect a highly academic and professionally trained journalistic workforce.

### JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

Most Austrian journalists are employed by an organization that has focused on newspaper publishing (43.5%), followed closely by television and radio outlets (43.0%), particularly by public service outlets (ORF). Weekly or monthly magazine companies employ 7.3% of Austrian journalists, news agencies 3.9%, and native online media 2.2%. In terms of ownership, 59.3% of these media companies are private, while the single largest employer, ORF, employs two out of five journalists. A majority of media outlets (57.4%) target a national audience; 34.3% operate regionally, 6.9% locally, and 1.3% transnationally.

At the individual level, 68.8% of journalists work full-time, 20.3% part-time, and 9.8% as freelancers. Middle management positions are held by 21.8%, with a further 14.4% in top management, meaning that over one-third of the respondents occupy some form of leadership role. Specialization is widespread, with 55.1% of respondents having a dedicated beat or subject area.

On average, Austrian journalists have 22.1 years of professional experience (SD = 10.6; Median = 23.0) and work 43.8 hours per week (SD = 9.1; Median = 40; only full-time journalists). Most (70.9%) derive all their income from journalism, and only 4.3% earn less than half of their total income from journalistic work. Union membership stands at 51.6%.

When asked about work-related stress, only 6.7% said they are rarely or never stressed by their journalistic duties. A further 27.5% reported occasional stress, while 34.1% and 31.7% feel stressed "often" or "very often" – meaning two-thirds of respondents suffer from high levels of stress, which points to potential occupational health issues in this profession.

## SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Most Austrian journalists face demeaning or hateful speech and efforts to undermine their credibility to varying degrees, while more severe threats – surveillance, hacking, arrests, lawsuits, stalking, or physical attacks are rather rare and never experienced by the vast majority. Workplace bullying and other intimidation are reported by more than 40%.

On the job, a significant share of respondents worries about their physical, emotional, and mental well-being, as well as possible impunity for those who harm journalists. These findings show that, although extreme threats remain uncommon, everyday verbal abuse and ongoing anxiety about safety and justice profoundly affect journalistic work. Given the challenging economic situation, particularly in the print sector, almost 15% of Austrian journalists fear losing their jobs.

**TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS**

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	853	2.9%	10.2%	32.1%	35.2%	19.6%
Public discrediting of your work	854	3.5%	9.5%	25.4%	29.6%	32.0%
Surveillance	778	0.8%	0.6%	4.4%	12.0%	82.3%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	850	0.1%	1.2%	3.2%	8.6%	86.9%
Arrests, detentions, or imprisonment	854	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.7%	98.9%
Legal actions against you because of your work	855	0.0%	0.4%	4.3%	11.5%	83.9%
Stalking	850	0.1%	0.4%	3.2%	11.1%	85.3%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	854	1.2%	1.6%	11.2%	28.1%	57.8%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	855	0.2%	0.6%	4.4%	9.0%	85.7%
Other physical attacks	855	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	4.3%	95.1%
Others disseminating your personal information	837	0.8%	0.8%	5.7%	17.3%	75.3%
Workplace bullying	855	1.9%	4.3%	9.6%	14.7%	59.5%
Office raids or seizures or damage to equipment	852	0.0%	0.1%	0.6%	5.2%	94.1%

Question: "In the last five years, how often have you experienced any of the following actions related to your work as a journalist?"

**TABLE 2. WORK-RELATED CONCERNS**

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Worried about losing job in journalism within the next 12 months	844	14.9%	2.04	1.17
Concerned about physical well-being	847	33.1%	2.55	1.38
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	845	38.1%	2.69	1.40
Concerned that those who harm journalists in [country] go unpunished	824	43.4%	2.96	1.34

Question: "Thinking about your work, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

## JOURNALISTIC ROLES

Neutral information delivery and the fight against disinformation are regarded as the most essential tasks for Austrian journalists. Solution-oriented reporting, highlighting social problems and outlining their future impacts are also relatively widespread. Much emphasis is also placed on providing analysis of current affairs, supporting the audience's independent formation of opinion, and telling stories that emotionally move the audience. On the other hand, collaborative roles that promote government agendas or cast political leaders in a favorable light are largely rejected.

**TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES**

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	850	86.1%	4.37	0.91
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	836	57.1%	3.54	1.29
Shine a light on society's problems	847	72.7%	3.98	1.02
Motivate people to participate in politics	842	40.4%	3.12	1.21
Provide analysis of current affairs	852	79.2%	4.16	1.02
Let people express their views	847	50.2%	3.40	1.12
Provide information people need to form political opinion	853	84.3%	4.30	0.87
Advocate for social change	819	31.4%	2.93	1.18
Influence public opinion	812	11.9%	2.33	1.04
Set the political agenda	819	7.6%	1.98	1.01
Promote peace and tolerance	830	52.9%	3.52	1.11
Educate the audience	840	64.2%	3.78	0.95
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	847	65.9%	3.79	1.02
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	846	52.6%	3.52	1.06
Support national development	799	13.9%	2.32	1.09
Support government policy	827	0.7%	1.27	0.57
Convey a positive image of political leaders	828	0.7%	1.21	0.54
Provide entertainment and relaxation	847	44.0%	3.25	1.21
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	847	60.0%	3.71	1.08
Provide advice, orientation, and direction for daily life	847	60.8%	3.66	1.11
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	851	67.7%	3.89	1.03
Support efforts to protect public health	831	34.7%	3.01	1.16
Counteract disinformation	851	86.1%	4.37	0.89
Discuss future implications of current events	850	71.5%	3.86	1.00

Question: "Please tell me how important it is to do each of the following in your daily work." (Scale: 5 = Extremely important; 4 = Very important; 3 = Moderately important; 2 = Slightly important; 1 = Not at all important.)

## JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

Austrian journalists prioritize fact-based reporting and the ideal of objectivity – most see it as essential to let facts speak for themselves, convey objective reality, and alert audiences to false claims. At the same time, they acknowledge that interpretation is necessary and favor transparency about their own standpoint. Just a few trust their intuition and instincts, or embed themselves in specific communities, and only a very few believe that things are either true or false.

**TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES**

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	802	57.9%	3.35	1.20
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	810	26.3%	2.43	1.18
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	823	28.2%	2.62	1.11
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	824	4.1%	1.61	0.87
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	813	65.4%	3.56	1.04
Journalists should trust their instincts in deciding what's true and what's not	823	11.1%	1.97	1.02
Journalists should intuitively know what the final story will be	819	23.0%	2.40	1.14
Journalists should let the facts speak for themselves	829	82.6%	4.01	0.84
Journalists should be part of a community to portray it accurately	823	7.5%	1.91	0.94
Journalists should make their standpoint transparent in their work	809	37.8%	2.85	1.34
Journalists should alert audiences when a source's claim is untruthful	818	94.0%	4.54	0.73

Questions: "The following statements deal with beliefs related to how journalists know what they know. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree." / "Using the same scale, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following beliefs." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

## JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

Most Austrian journalists agree that professional standards alone should govern ethical decisions, though many acknowledge that exceptional circumstances or specific situations may justify deviations. Only a small fraction of respondents think that personal judgment should determine whether something is ethical. Consistent with these high ethical standards, nearly all reject practices like taking money from sources or disguising ads as journalism, and most also oppose gifts, paid trips, and adopting false identities. The majority considers the use of confidential or personal documents without authorization to be justified in some instances.

**TABLE 5. ETHICAL ORIENTATIONS**

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
What is ethical for journalists should always be determined by professional standards regardless of situation and personal judgment	831	82.3%	4.11	0.99
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	805	41.4%	2.91	1.25
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	823	32.7%	2.61	1.32
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	832	12.7%	1.88	1.11

Question: "The following statements describe different responses journalists may have to ethical problems. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

**TABLE 6. JUSTIFICATION OF CONTROVERSIAL REPORTING METHODS**

	N	Always justified	Justified on occasion
Claiming to be somebody else	854	0.4%	41.2%
Using hidden recording devices	853	1.3%	58.1%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	853	8.0%	66.6%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	855	1.9%	57.5%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	853	0.2%	12.2%
Paying people for confidential information	854	0.4%	31.3%
Accepting money from sources	855	0.0%	2.1%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	855	0.2%	19.4%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	854	0.2%	6.1%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	853	0.0%	45.6%

Question: "Which of the following, if any, do you think may be always justified, or justified on occasion, and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?"

## EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

While Austrian journalists overwhelmingly report great freedom in selecting their news stories and even greater autonomy in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized, they are significantly more pessimistic regarding journalists in other media organizations than their own. Less than a third of respondents consider Austrian media outlets generally very or entirely free.

**TABLE 7. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM**

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	854	70.6%	3.82	0.75
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	852	86.0%	4.19	0.70
Media freedom in Austria	829	28.8%	3.21	0.65

(Scale: 5 = Complete freedom; 4 = A great deal of freedom; 3 = Some freedom; 2 = Little freedom; 1 = No freedom at all.)

## EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Austrian journalists experience the most significant influence on their work from pervasive time constraints and ethical standards. The available resources and access to information are also perceived as influential, as well as newsroom factors such as supervisors, higher editors, colleagues, and the editorial policy. Any form of influence from censorship, politicians, or other government officials appears to have little relevance – at least in the perception of Austrian journalists.

**TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES**

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	825	35.3%	3.08	0.96
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	830	39.8%	3.18	0.99
The business managers of the news organization	807	12.9%	2.10	1.11
The owners of the news organization	771	9.6%	1.86	1.06
Editorial policy	805	31.8%	2.85	1.15
Advertising considerations	798	9.5%	1.89	1.08
Profit expectations	761	11.0%	1.91	1.13
Audience research and data	819	27.5%	2.75	1.18
Availability of news-gathering resources	827	54.1%	3.46	1.15
Time limits	846	63.9%	3.70	0.97
Journalism ethics	829	65.0%	3.69	1.10
Self-censorship	786	14.6%	2.30	1.10
Personal values and beliefs	836	48.2%	3.37	1.08
Colleagues in other media	812	6.0%	1.97	0.90
Friends, acquaintances and family	818	4.4%	2.08	0.86
Feedback from the audience	834	17.7%	2.71	0.91
Competing news organizations	822	13.4%	2.36	0.99
Media laws and regulation	796	30.2%	2.74	1.22
Access to information	810	39.1%	3.04	1.14
Government censorship	773	2.1%	1.28	0.69
Government officials	780	1.4%	1.32	0.64
Politicians	796	3.5%	1.56	0.82
Business people	804	4.2%	1.61	0.87
Public relations	824	7.2%	2.00	0.94
Relationships with news sources	823	21.6%	2.52	1.18
Police	781	5.2%	1.55	0.93
Issue advocacy groups	810	8.0%	2.02	1.01

Question: "Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work as a journalist." (Scale: 5 = Extremely influential; 4 = Very influential; 3 = Moderately influential; 2 = Slightly influential; 1 = Not at all influential.)

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