

# Denmark

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## INTRODUCTION

The Danish society is a traditional Nordic welfare state with approximately 6 million inhabitants. After many economic crises and frequent elections in the 1970s to early 1990s, the political and economic situation became more stable with historic low unemployment and a decline in public debt. The global financial crisis in 2007-2008 and COVID-19 were generally viewed as having been managed better than in most other countries. The 2022 election led to the first majority government in decades, comprising parties from both the right and left. According to Eurobarometer, support for and satisfaction with democracy in Denmark is number one in Europe. Denmark was also rated highly in the University of Gothenburg V-Dem Institute's global ranking of democracies in 2025. The journalistic tradition until the 1960s in Denmark was economically independent party press, which changed to strong economic support for public service media and the primarily foundation-owned newspapers. Press freedom is strong, but newspapers – especially local ones – have for decades fought against declines in subscriptions and advertising, which have led to major staff cuts. Many journalists are under pressure because of the increase in their daily workload and a strong focus on performance and clicks.

## BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

Our sample of Danish journalists is balanced in terms of gender: 49.6% of the sample were women. On average, they were 45.7 years old (SD = 14.1; Median = 45). They were largely well educated: 62.8% of them held a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, and 23.7% had obtained a Master's degree or equivalent. Further, 82.2% had acquired formal education or professional training in journalism. This education was usually obtained at university or college (97.0%) as opposed to via apprenticeships or cadetships (2.7%) or short-term courses (0.3%).

## JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

In terms of the background of their main employers, the most common are organizations focused on newspaper publishing (28.1%) or TV organizations (27.9%), with the remainder divided between native online media (12.1%), magazine companies (9.4%), radio outlets (6.6%), or news agencies (1.1%); an additional 14.9% reported either no main employer (12.1%) or a different type of employer than the options listed (2.8%). Regarding area of coverage, 59% of journalists reported working for (trans)national media and 29.3% for local or regional media, with 11.7% reporting no main medium (and thus, area of coverage) in which they worked. A majority (54.9%) said they worked for private or commercial media; 33.7% said they worked for public service media, and 11.4% of respondents to this question reported no main medium.

On average, journalists in our sample had 19.0 years of professional experience (SD = 13.5; Median = 18). A slight majority (52.3%) said that they worked a specific beat or subject area, as opposed to a variety (47.7%). Journalists reported working an average of 39.2 hours per week (SD = 5.6; Median = 37; for those in full-time employment). Most respondents (75.0%) reported no management role, with smaller percentages in middle management (20.9%) or top management (4.1%) positions.

A majority of respondents (62.5%) said that they were employed on full-time permanent contracts, with smaller percentages reporting full-time fixed-term contracts (11.2%), part-time permanent contracts (4.4%), part-time fixed-term contracts (1.1%), freelance or self-employed work (17.8%), or other work arrangements than those listed (3.0%). 73.3% of those in our sample said that they obtained all of their income from journalism, with 26.7% reporting that they obtained some portion from other work.

## JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

Overall, journalists did not report a high prevalence of experienced threats (see Table 1) or work-related concerns (see Table 2). Demeaning or hateful speech or public discrediting of journalists' work were among the most cited safety threats experienced by those in our sample. Turning to work-related concerns, 15% of respondents strongly agreed that they were worried about losing their job in journalism within the next 12 months; less than 10% reported concerns regarding physical, emotional, or mental well-being, or that those who harmed journalists in the country would go unpunished.

**TABLE 1. EXPERIENCED THREATS**

	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Demeaning or hateful speech directed at you	454	2.4%	4.4%	21.8%	38.5%	32.8%
Public discrediting of your work	453	1.3%	2.2%	16.1%	32.9%	47.5%
Surveillance	426	0.0%	0.5%	2.6%	6.6%	90.4%
Hacking or blocking of social media accounts or websites	450	0.0%	0.2%	1.3%	5.3%	93.1%
Arrests, detentions or imprisonment	453	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.7%	99.1%
Legal actions against you because of your work	453	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	4.6%	94.7%
Stalking	452	0.0%	0.2%	0.9%	3.8%	95.1%
Other threats or intimidations directed at you	454	0.9%	0.9%	7.5%	21.6%	69.2%
Sexual assault or sexual harassment	454	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	3.7%	95.2%
Other physical attacks	454	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	2.2%	97.4%

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	443	32.5%	2.68	1.41
Concerned about physical well-being	449	20.5%	2.25	1.18
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	448	29.2%	2.61	1.25
Concerned that those who harm journalists in Denmark go unpunished	416	14.9%	2.15	1.14

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**

Danish journalists in our sample strongly supported the notion that a central role of journalists is to shine a light on society's problems (93.9% said doing so was "very" or "extremely" important), as is counteracting disinformation (91.4%), monitoring those in power (82.1%), providing information to the public to help them to develop informed political opinions (81.8%), and acting as a detached observer (72.7%). Journalists were particularly opposed to the notion that a role for their profession was to support government policy or convey a positive image of political leaders (see Table 3).

**TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC ROLES**

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	469	72.7%	4.00	0.95
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	470	82.1%	4.23	0.93
Shine a light on society's problems	472	93.9%	4.58	0.66
Motivate people to participate in politics	454	32.8%	2.90	1.18
Provide analysis of current affairs	470	66.2%	3.80	0.94
Let people express their views	469	48.4%	3.39	1.10
Provide information people need to form political opinion	467	81.8%	4.19	0.89
Advocate for social change	433	24.0%	2.50	1.24
Influence public opinion	438	20.3%	2.44	1.20
Set the political agenda	452	35.2%	2.95	1.16
Promote peace and tolerance	438	31.5%	2.83	1.26
Educate the audience	460	55.9%	3.56	1.19
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	467	56.1%	3.58	1.01
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	458	45.6%	3.29	1.15
Support national development	401	27.2%	2.66	1.21
Support government policy	468	0.2%	1.05	0.31
Convey a positive image of political leaders	463	0.7%	1.11	0.42
Provide entertainment and relaxation	469	10.5%	2.15	1.02
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	460	11.1%	2.21	1.02
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	468	24.8%	2.78	1.03
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	460	25.7%	2.76	1.06
Support efforts to protect public health	432	16.2%	2.33	1.12
Counteract disinformation	467	91.4%	4.61	0.73

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**

There was a fair amount of disagreement between journalists as regards journalistic epistemologies (see Table 4). However, journalists generally disagreed that things are either true or false, there is no in-between (76.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

**TABLE 4. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES**

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	408	42.9%	3.20	1.03
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	434	32.0%	2.79	1.11
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	443	26.2%	2.66	1.07
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	443	6.3%	2.05	0.89
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	445	56.4%	3.39	1.00

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**

Journalists in our sample generally agreed (48.0% agreed and 24.3% strongly agreed) that ethics should be dictated by professional standards except for in extraordinary circumstances (Table 5). Regarding the ethics of specific reporting methods (Table 6), respondents overwhelmingly felt that accepting money from sources was unacceptable under any circumstances. They were, however, more approving of the ethics of using hidden recording devices, as well as confidential business or government documents and the personal materials of powerful people without prior authorization.

**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	423	55.1%	3.48	1.16
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	408	72.3%	3.80	1.02
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	434	33.9%	2.84	1.20
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	441	15.6%	2.22	1.09

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	472	0.2%	81.4%
Using hidden recording devices	472	0.9%	98.3%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	472	6.6%	88.4%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	472	2.8%	86.4%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	472	0.6%	54.5%
Paying people for confidential information	472	0.9%	18.4%
Accepting money from sources	472	0.9%	1.5%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	472	0.6%	23.1%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	472	1.7%	20.3%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	472	0.4%	58.5%

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

Journalists perceived high levels of editorial autonomy and media freedom in Denmark (see Table 7). Majorities of respondents said there was a great deal or complete freedom in selecting news stories (62.3%), deciding which aspects of stories to emphasize (72.0%), and as regards media freedom (84.4%).

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

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	472	62.3%	3.60	0.89
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	472	72.0%	3.88	0.87
Media freedom in Denmark	467	84.4%	3.97	0.58

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

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

Journalists in our sample reported journalism ethics, editorial supervisors, access to information, and time limits as the strongest editorial influences (see Table 8). Comparatively few perceived advertising, politicians, government, business, or the police as having a significant editorial influence.

**TABLE 8. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES**

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	456	52.6%	3.50	1.03
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	460	66.1%	3.81	0.95
The business managers of the news organization	409	12.7%	2.05	1.12
The owners of the news organization	412	11.9%	1.93	1.15
Editorial policy	453	59.8%	3.66	1.06
Advertising considerations	414	3.1%	1.44	0.82
Profit expectations	425	14.6%	2.13	1.22
Audience research and data	450	31.3%	2.96	1.14
Availability of news-gathering resources	440	60.0%	3.71	1.00
Time limits	467	65.1%	3.81	1.04
Journalism ethics	467	80.9%	4.17	0.82
Self-censorship	403	8.9%	1.96	1.03
Personal values and beliefs	457	32.2%	2.93	1.19
Colleagues in other media	448	4.2%	1.87	0.89
Friends, acquaintances and family	456	4.4%	1.80	0.86
Feedback from the audience	455	15.4%	2.54	0.97
Competing news organizations	450	10.2%	2.31	0.94
Media laws and regulation	435	42.8%	3.22	1.17
Access to information	446	65.5%	3.79	0.98
Government censorship	412	5.8%	1.47	0.89
Government officials	416	6.0%	1.68	0.94
Politicians	421	9.0%	1.85	1.03
Business people	416	5.5%	1.65	0.93
Public relations	434	9.0%	2.14	0.98
Relationships with news sources	445	44.3%	3.30	1.13
Police	410	5.9%	1.64	0.91
Issue advocacy groups	425	7.1%	1.86	0.99
Scientists or health experts	422	22.0%	2.46	1.25

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.)