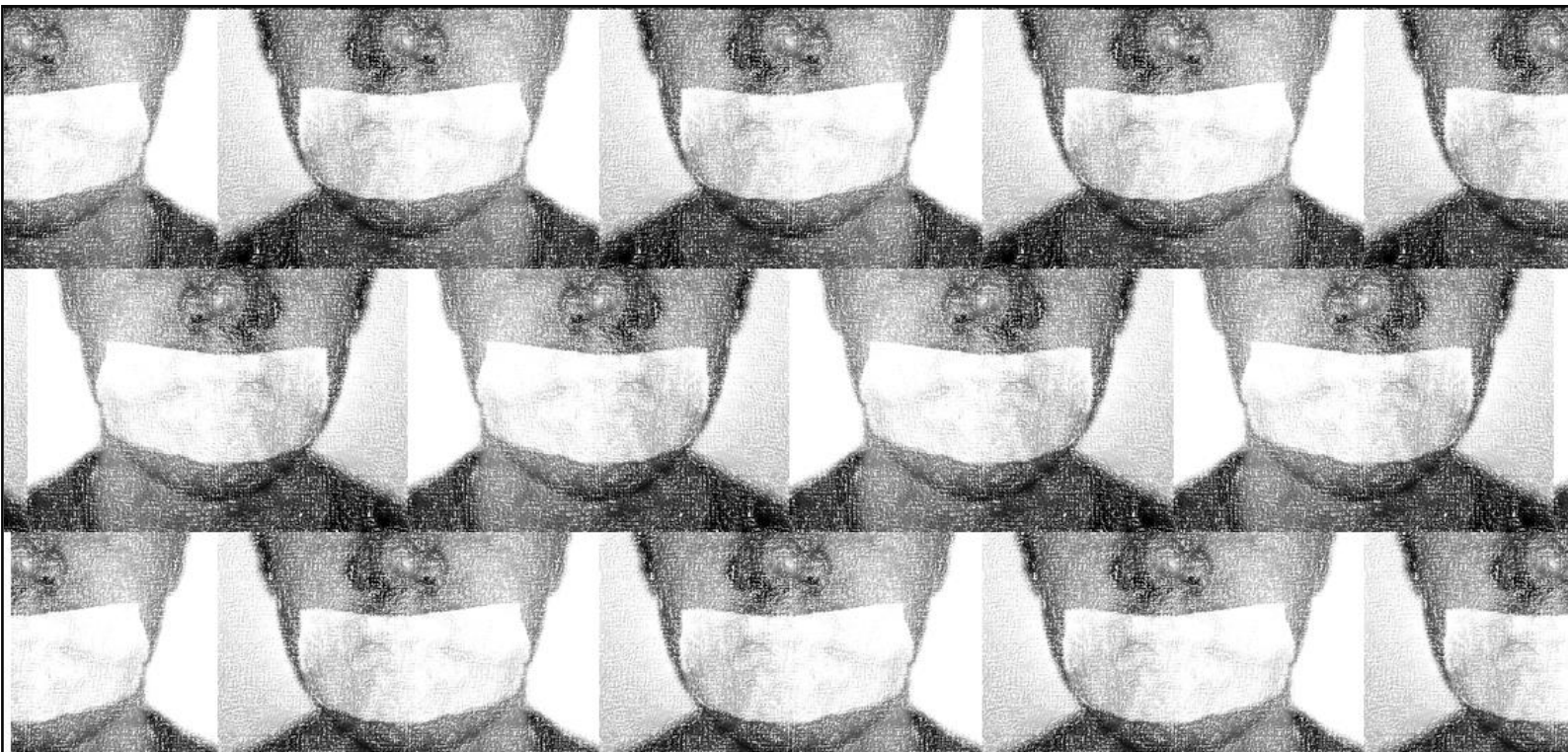


# The News Media Landscape: An overview of the context of Press Freedom and Regulation in Finland

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## Abstract

*The News Media Landscape: An Overview of the Context of Press Freedom and Regulation in Finland* examines the structure, regulation and cultural context of journalism in Finland. The report was produced as part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project *Defining Freedom of the Press: A Cross-National Examination of Press Ethics and Regulation*, which explores and compares systems of press freedom and ethics across a range of European democracies. It examines Finland's constitutional protections for freedom of expression, its long-established system of media self-regulation, and the role of the Council for Mass Media. The report explores the structure of the Finnish media landscape, including the regional press, patterns of media ownership, and the financial challenges facing news organisations. It also considers audience news consumption, levels of public trust, and the central role of public service broadcasting. The report provides a detailed national case study designed to inform comparative research on press regulation, ethics and media freedom within democratic systems.

## Finland

**RSF ranking:** 5<sup>th</sup> out of 180 (RSF, 2024)

**Population:** 5.5m (Worldometer, 2024)

**Percentage in the capital:** 24 per cent (1.34m; World Population Review, 2024)

**GDP:** 300.5bn USD (Statista, 2024)

**EU member:** since January 1, 1995 (EUROPA, 2024)

**Official languages:**

Finnish (88.3 per cent), Swedish (5.3 per cent), Russian (1.4 per cent), Sámi (0.03 per cent) (Minority Rights, 2023)

**Press council:** *Julkisen sanan neuvosto* (The Council for Mass Media)

## Press freedom environment:

Freedom House classes Finland as a “free” country with a maximum score of 100 out of 100 (Freedom House, 2024). This score is split 40/60 for political rights and for civil liberties (Ibid.). The Freedom House narrative report describes the parliamentary system as featuring “free and fair elections and robust multiparty competition” (Ibid.). Women and minority groups are able to exercise equal rights, although there is some hate speech, harassment and discrimination aimed at minority ethnic, racial and religious groups (Freedom House, 2024). The new centre-right coalition in Finland has endured scandals surrounding racist comments and the government released new proposals to fight racism and discrimination in Finnish society in August 2023. Finland is also a new member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, after many years of being militarily neutral (Ibid.).

The “Civil Liberties” section of the report sets out that freedom of expression in Finland is protected (Freedom House, 2024). It is guaranteed by Article 12 of the constitution and the 2003 Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media (Ibid.). This results in a “strong” media environment, largely free from political pressure or censorship. However, there is sometimes harassment of journalists, especially in relation to stories about immigrants and immigration (Ibid.). Some politicians from the new government were accused of online harassment of a journalist in July 2023, leading to condemnation from European Union authorities and the Finnish Union of Journalists (Ibid.). Two journalists from newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* were fined after being found guilty of revealing state secrets relating to military intelligence. Freedom House says this “was widely condemned as setting a dangerous precedent for press freedom” (Ibid.).

## **Media landscape**

The Reuters Digital News Report (2024) categorises the Finnish media market as having a strong regional press and a strong public broadcaster (YLE) (Reunanen, 2024). *Helsingin Sanomat* is the most widely read quality newspaper, while there are two evening tabloids which reach more than half of the adult population (Ibid.). Several regional newspapers have moved away from daily print production in favour of their digital outlets. This is attributable to the decline in income and rising delivery costs in sparsely populated regional areas (Ibid.). In the first six months of 2023, five regional newspapers announced plans to do reduce deliveries on a daily basis (Ibid.).

## **Newspapers and market**

There were 274 newspapers in Finland in 2022, which was a fall on the previous year (Statista, 2024a). This continued the pattern of a ten-year decline, since 2012 when the number of all types of newspapers decreased. As of 2022, there were 45 newspapers, 155 local titles and 74 free papers (Ibid.). In 2016, Finland had a total of 174 paid-for newspapers, 39 of which are daily newspapers and 135 weeklies (Harrie, 2018: 24). Finland has one free daily and 55 free non-daily newspapers (Ibid.: 67). Between 2000 and 2016, Finland had the most newspapers either being consolidated or being shut down out of the three Nordic countries (Harrie, 2018: 24). By then, as with other Nordic countries, online readership of newspapers had reached 80 per cent, a figure which rose to 93 per cent by 2019 (Ibid.).

The media in Finland is described as consisting of a combination of subscription regional daily newspapers and robust radio and television provided by the public service broadcaster, *Yleisradio* (YLE; Manninen, 2018: 2). Established regional newspapers, from both towns and geographic areas, mean that the newspaper market is less concentrated (Manninen, 2018: 2), however, one daily, the *Helsingin Sanomat* is considered to be a key newspaper, along with two evening tabloids

(Reunanen, 2018).<sup>1</sup> Newspapers have seen a consolidation process and Finns are resistant to shifting to paid-for online content as newspapers seek to establish themselves online (Manninen, 2018: 2). Newspapers are addressing this by offering other forms of engagement online, such as classified spaces, real estate ads, and employment ads (Reunanen, 2018). By 2024, Reunanen wrote in the Reuters Digital News Report that print revenues had continued to decline but digital earnings were also not growing much. Subscriptions are also heavily concentrated, with 51 per cent of digital subscribers paying for *Helsingin Sanomat* (Reunanen, 2024) and a very high 38 per cent paying for online regional or local news. In March 2021, one of the two Finnish evening tabloids, *Ilta-Sanomat* (evening, tabloid) introduced a paid 'Plus' section in March 2021 and *Ilta-Sanomat* (evening, tabloid) reacted to *Ilta-Sanomat*'s successful model by introducing its own paid 'Extra' section in February 2024 (Ibid.). Subscriptions cost €6.99 per month and both tabloids now publish a few stories behind their paywalls each day (Ibid.).

A study in 2018 listed the top five newspapers as *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Aamulehti*, *Turun Sanomat* (quality, regional), *Kaleva* (quality, regional), and *Keskisuomalainen* (quality, regional; Harrie, 2018: 76). Each of these titles survives today, with *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Aamulehti* moving to compact format and *Helsingin Sanomat* adopting a subscription finance model (hs.fi, 2024). *Keskisuomalainen* is the oldest Finnish newspaper, having been founded in 1871 (Pasanen, 2018). *Aamulehti* was first printed in 1881 (Ellilä, 2016), *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Turun Sanomat* in 1905 (University of Jyväskylä, 2019) (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019) and *Kaleva* in 1899 (Kaleva Media, 2019). Competition between national daily newspapers is low and most cities and towns have their own newspapers (Jyrkiäinen and Heinonen, 2012: 172). The five largest newspapers, by circulation, for 2018 were: *Helsingin Sanomat* (332,717), *Turun Sanomat* (76,291), *Keskisuomalainen* (71,282), *Savon Sanomat* (57,429), *Kaleva* (55,305; Statista, 2020). Statista updated these circulation figures in 2020, collating data for various large daily newspapers. These figures showed *Keskisuomalainen* on top with 65,347 (Statista, 2024b) although the subscriber-only publications were not included.<sup>2</sup>

Swedish conglomerate Bonnier has become majority owner of *Hufvudstadsbladet* and local newspapers *Västra Nyland* and *Östra Nyland*, previously owned by Konstsamfundet, but ownership of Finnish regional media is still dominated by two key players: Sanoma and *Keskisuomalainen* (Reunanen, 2024). Sanoma has acquired *Länsi-Suomi* and merged it with *Satakunnan Kansa* another regional paper. *Keskisuomalainen* expanded by buying PunaMusta's media businesses including its regional title *Karjalainen* (Ibid.).

## Audience news consumption

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<sup>1</sup> These tabloids were not specified in the report.

<sup>2</sup> See the Appendix for Statista's collated circulation figures for 2020.

The 2024 Reuters Digital News Report combines results of weekly usage across television, radio, and print, as well as online in Finland (Newman et al., 2024: 79.). The main public broadcaster, YLE, ranks at the top at 65 per cent for TV, radio, and print, and an increased 42 per cent for online (the figure was 35 per cent in 2019). MTV3 News ranks second at 52 per cent for TV, radio, and print, and 26 per cent for online (a 3 per cent increase on 2019) (Ibid.). In terms of the top four newspapers, *Ilta-Sanomat* (tabloid, popular) was at 56 per cent for online and 18 per cent for print, *Iltaalehti* (tabloid, popular) has grown its online presence from 54 to 60 per cent, while also growing its print reach from 16 to 19 per cent (Ibid.). *Helsingin Sanomat*, in its new format and subscription finance model, is at 29 per cent for online but has fallen from 17 to 14 per cent reach for its print editions (Ibid.). Combined usage of regional and local newspapers stands at 37 per cent for print editions and 28 per cent for online (Ibid.). Internet penetration in Finland is high at 94 per cent (Ibid.).

The Eurobarometer Media & News Survey (2023) polled 1,010 Finns on their news consumption habits. The most popular source of news was television at 70 per cent, one percentage point lower than the EU average. Social media for news consumption was 43 per cent (compared to the EU average of 37 per cent). Well ahead of the EU average (21 per cent), 29 per cent of respondents still sourced news from the print media (Ibid.).

## **Public service media**

The major Finnish public broadcaster, *Yleisradio Oy* (YLE), is 99.9 per cent state-owned and funded via a named tax (YLE, 2019a). YLE was founded in 1926 as a radio broadcaster, and added television in 1958 (YLE, 2019b). It has four television channels, six radio channels, 24 regional radio stations, as well as additional broadcast services (YLE, 2019a). It reaches 76 per cent of the population daily, and 93 per cent weekly (Ibid.). In 2017, it had a turnover of €472.3m (Ibid.). Its website states:

The public considers YLE to be a reliable source of news and current affairs. The company plays a major role in producing and presenting programmes dealing with national arts, educational programmes and children's programmes. YLE's services to the public also cover special and minority groups (Ibid.).

The Reuters Digital News Report states that funding of YLE has become contentious and may be the focus of new recommendations in 2024. At the time of writing, politicians are still considering cuts to YLE's half-billion-euro budget amid accusations of unfair competition in the digital space from private media companies (Reunanen, 2024). YLE is currently publicly funded by an annual tax for those earning over €14000 of 2.5% with no more than €163 to be paid by an individual over that threshold (Ibid.).

## Public trust in the press and media

According to the 2024 Digital News Report, overall trust in Finnish news is a very high 69 per cent, with Finland ranking 1<sup>st</sup> out of the 47 countries in the study (Newman et al., 2024: 79). The most trusted sources of news is YLE (public broadcaster) on 85 per cent, but *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Talouselämä* (financial news, weekly), MTV News and local newspapers all record 80 per cent trust scores (Ibid.). The least trusted news sources are free city papers (58 per cent), but even the lowest ranking publications and *Ilta-Sanomat* (tabloid, popular) and *Uusi Suomi* (Ibid.).

In 2016, 1,000 Finnish participants took part in Special Eurobarometer 452, titled *Media pluralism and democracy* (Eurobarometer, 2016). Here, 85 per cent of participants thought that the national media represented a “diversity of views and opinions”, and 78 per cent thought that the media were “free from political or commercial pressure” (Eurobarometer, 2016: Country Factsheet: Finland). Likewise, 65 per cent believed that public broadcasting services were free from political influence (Ibid.). General trust in media was at 88 per cent (Ibid.), reliability in television was at 90 per cent, radio at 93 per cent, and newspapers (both print and online) at 88 per cent; however, trust in social media platforms was lower at 68 per cent (Ibid.). A low number of participants were aware of regulatory bodies at 15 per cent, with 76 per cent thinking that they were free from political or commercial influence (Ibid.). In the study, 22 per cent of Finnish respondents thought that journalists, bloggers, and social media users were the targets of hate speech and abuse (Ibid.).

## Online only/digital entrants

Former print paper *Uusi Suomi* re-launched online in 2007 with wide access as a national news and blog website (Fielden, 2012: 36). However, it has seen its weekly reach fall from 2017, when it scored 9 per cent (Reunanen, 2018), to just 6 per cent in the most recent figures (Newman et al., 2024: 79). The national broadcaster, YLE, remains the top source for obtaining news online, and evening tabloids also offer free content, leaving a wealth of online content accessible to audiences, in addition to subscription packages offered by newspapers (Ibid.). Furthermore, YLE offers content without ads and is subscription-free, which competitors cite as being unfair, and is something that is currently under review Finnish politicians (Ibid.).

New startup *Briif* curates newspaper and magazine stories for an audio audience, charging €11.99 per month or €99.99 per year (Reunanen, 2024). *Briif*'s target audience is young women, drawing content from various providers including

Otava, Sanoma and the *Financial Times*, paying them fees according to listening figures. They have ambitions to expand into other European markets (Ibid.).

In terms of online-only brands, the Reuters Digital News Report for 2024 lists MSN and *Uusi Suomi* in its list of the most-used sources of news “used last week”. Both have a reach of 6 per cent (Newman et al., 2024: 79). For longform news stories online, *Longplay.fi* was created as a start-up by eight freelance journalists in 2013 (Longplay, 2020). Articles are sold to readers using a direct reader funding model, as “an experiment that is aimed at creating a reader-funded publishing model for serious, high-quality journalism” (Ibid.). There are collaborations with *Zetland* in Denmark, and *The Correspondent* in the Netherlands (Ibid.; see also: Bartlett, 2013a; 2013b). Another digital entrant, the alt-right website *MV-Lehti*, saw a rebranding and restructuring in 2018, after proceedings related to incitement to hatred (Reunanen, 2018; Leppänen, 2018).

### **Additional context: digital engagement**

Hallin and Mancini’s model of *media systems* (2004), describes Finland as having a *Northern European or Democratic Corporatist Model*, which is “characterised by a strong mass press, a high degree of political parallelism, professional journalism, and strong public service” (Harrie, 2018: 13).

Data on risks to media pluralism in Finland point back to 2016, with few changes in 2017, showing that Finland has mixed rankings with “high risk” to market plurality (68 per cent), “medium risk” to social inclusiveness (50 per cent) and political independence (44 per cent), and “low risk” to basic protection (23 per cent) (Manninen, 2018: 3-8). Interestingly, the high risks have to do with lack of government controls on media and media content, with problems in the Finnish media market mainly related to falling profits, a concentrated market, and lack of representation for minorities (Ibid.: 3). In summary, the report highlighted the following in its conclusion regarding each category (Ibid.: 9):

Basic Protection: The legal framework for free and pluralist media is strong in Finland. There are still blemishes, most notably the non-existent protection of whistleblowers and heavy punishments for defamation. The legislative branch should consider revising the legislation to meet international standards. Furthermore, all public officials should be trained to uniformly implement the freedom of information legislation.

Market Plurality: The Finnish media market is highly concentrated. It is unclear, however, how many competitors the relatively small market could support. New anti-concentration measures are not advisable with current knowledge, but it is recommendable for the Finnish Competition and Consumer Authority to regularly monitor the situation.

Before implementing any new regulation, an analysis should be conducted to determine the amount of competition the market is capable of supporting.

**Political Independence:** Most Finnish media are politically independent, and the identified risks stem from lack of compelling legislation. New regulation should not be introduced as long as the desired outcome is reached without it. Thus, Finnish media's political independence should be monitored and nascent issues tackled through self-regulation before legal intervention is required. Preferably, this monitoring should be conducted multilaterally between the media industry and academia.

**Social Inclusiveness:** Finland has an extensive framework for promoting media access for various social groups. Small niche audiences are still persistently underserved. The public service broadcaster should strive to better engage neglected groups, and the Finnish state should consider improving the support schemes available to minority, local, and community media.

Finland is a safe country to be a journalist, but as recently as 2018, right-wing website *MV-Lehti* was convicted for trolling award-winning YLE investigative journalist Jessikka Aro, due to her research into online Russian propaganda (BBC, 2018). This eventually caused her to leave her job and become an independent author (Heikkilä and Väliaverronen, 2019).

In terms of the current RSF rankings, Finland is ranked as 5<sup>th</sup> (out of 180) in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index, down from second in 2020 (RSF, 2020). According to the 2024 Digital News Report, overall trust in Finnish news is at 69 per cent, with Finland recording the highest score of all 47 countries in the study (Newman et al., 2024: 79). Internet penetration in Finland is at 94 per cent (Ibid.: 78).

## **Regulatory environment**

The regulatory environment for Finnish media is due to be overhauled in October 2024, when a new ethical code comes into effect (Reunanen, 2024). This is part of the "Journalistic Guidelines" set out by the Council for Mass Media in Finland (CMM) (jsn.fi, 2024). These guidelines are the self-regulatory ethical guidebook for journalists in the country (Reunanen, 2024). The CMM sets out the Journalistic Guidelines on its website, with the stated aim that they are designed "to support the responsible use of freedom of speech in mass communication and encourage discourse on professional ethics" (jsn.fi, 2024). One addition to the code, due in late 2024, is that sponsored articles should be permissible, as long as the source of funding is made clear (Reunanen, 2024), while other editorial decisions must be made independently of financial backers (Ibid.)

Media ownership in Finland is mostly unregulated (Manninen, 2018: 2). The Finnish Communications Regulatory Authority administers radio and television licenses, and in 2017, legislation was passed that allowed parliament to have more authority over the YLE (Ibid.).

### **The press council**

The Council for Mass Media (CMM) sets out ethical standards for Finnish journalists (jsn.fi, 2024). Finland has been described as the “founding father” of press councils, with the Court of Honour of the Finnish Press being established in 1919 (Jones, 1980: 19) and the CMM following in 1968, to self-regulate newspapers, magazines, radio, and television (Ibid.). It also acts as the press council for new media (Fielden, 2012: 16). The Finnish press council context is unique among the other Nordic countries, in that it came about during post-war years when the Soviet Union still had much influence, including journalists engaging in self-censorship (Ibid.: 20) having undergone a process of “social democratisation” (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 92). Party-political press in the 1950s gave way to news-based commercial press, followed by “yellow press” (gossip) in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly on the intimate lives of politicians. This led to the 1974 *Lex Hymy* privacy law in the Finnish Criminal Code (Fielden, 2012: 20). Around this time was the “Finlandisation” debate, which “refers to a foreign policy strategy where a smaller state adapts its policy to the interests of a bigger neighbouring country, typically a Great Power”, which in this case was the Soviet Union (Forsberg and Pesu, 2016: 474).

Finland’s press council works on a model of self-regulation, where anyone can present a complaint (Fielden, 2012: 8,9). In terms of sanctions, corrections must be published in the case of all media (Ibid.). The council is partly funded by the State (30 per cent), the rest by the Council’s Management Group, which consists of organisations including the Union of Journalists, the Finnish Periodical Publishers’ Association, and the YLE (Ibid.: 16, 110; organisations’ names are the current ones).<sup>3</sup> Recently the Finnish press council has faced challenges in having its verdicts and moral authority recognised by companies (Ríos et al., 2018: 225). However, the same study found that the Finnish press council had a perceived impact on journalists’ behaviour (Ibid.: 237).

Looking directly at the source, the Council for Mass Media has basic information on its model and practices available in English. Starting with the frontpage, it describes itself as follows:

The Council for Mass Media (CMM) is a self-regulating committee established by publishers and journalists in the field of mass communication for the purpose of interpreting good professional

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<sup>3</sup> The Finnish Union of Journalists was founded in 1921 (Suomen Journalistiliitto, 2019).

practice and defending the freedom of speech and publication. The Council also addresses the methods by which journalists acquire their information. The Council does not exercise legal jurisdiction or public authority. Its decisions are, however, closely followed and observed. This is also true in other countries that have media councils that serve a similar function to the CMM (Julkisen sanan neuvoston, 2020a).

Anyone can file a complaint with the CMM for a “breach of good professional practice by the press, radio or television”, in addition to published content on online media (Julkisen sanan neuvoston, 2020a). The complainant can be an indirect party. However, consent must be obtained from the affected person for that complaint to be carried forward (Ibid.). Once a decision has been passed, it must be published on the offending party’s platform, and if not, it will “be otherwise made public” (the website does not specify how; (Ibid.). Although the website does not specify which media, it states that the “majority” of the country’s media has signed the “Council’s Basic Agreement”, which means that they will adhere to and honour the procedures of the CMM (Ibid.). If a situation requires it, where “important principles” need to be revisited, the CMM is able to also independently investigate an issue or topic (Ibid.).

The CMM acknowledges that it is regarded as an example or model for other countries, as to how an independent press council should work and function (Julkisen sanan neuvoston, 2020e). It cites the reason for this being that it covers Finnish media, including news media, women’s magazines, radio stations, children’s magazines, and political party newspapers; and due to this encompassing reach, the media context creates the setting for Finnish media to “operate freely and responsibly at the same time” (Ibid.). Another reason is the relatively low number of decisions (“verdicts”) that it passes, with only 38 decisions issued out of 468 complaints in 2016 (Ibid.). Another reason it cites for the high threshold is because the standard of journalistic practice is high, where mistakes are acknowledged and corrected and promising to honour the CMM’s Guidelines for Journalists, which has clauses like a commitment against propagating misinformation, which means that “when the media regulate themselves, the authorities and the courts do not need to intervene” (Ibid.).

The CMM meets once a month with all fourteen members of the council (Julkisen sanan neuvoston, 2020b). The Chairman is the first member, followed thirteen members, all of whom serve a three-year term (Julkisen sanan neuvoston, 2008). The Chairman is selected by the Managing Group of The Council for Mass Media, and the thirteen members are split between eight members representing different areas of the media (selected by the Managing Group and five members represent the public (selected by the CMM; Ibid.). The CMM takes around five months to handle each case, and the complaint must be registered within three months of the alleged infraction (Ibid.).

A typical complaint to the CMM is with regards to advertising, where ads resemble journalistic content in both print and online materials; the latter meaning that the CMM also takes complaints about blogs (Julkisen sanan neuvoston, 2020c). A “Statement on marking news automation and personalization” was approved by the CMM at its meeting from October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019, which aimed to “define the use of algorithmic tools as part of journalistic work and to assure the public that media outlets act responsibly and transparently while using algorithms”, where “media outlets use algorithmic tools in a manner that safeguards the public’s access to diverse information about the world” (Julkisen sanan neuvoston, 2020d). Very briefly, the Danish press council meets every other year with the other Nordic press councils from Finland, Norway, and Sweden (Pressenævnet, 2016). The Finnish press council will host the next meeting of Nordic press councils in 2020 (Pressenævnet, 2018). Further details about the press council can be reviewed on the webpage called “Basic Agreement”, which was signed by the CMM’s Managing Group consisting of eight major organisations (Julkisen sanan neuvoston, 2015).<sup>4</sup>

### **Recent press council report/cases**

The annual reports are only available in Finnish. A translation of the most recent report (the most recent one online at the time of writing is from 2023). A cursory look at the 2023 report, using online translation tools, shows that 2023 was a record year for complaints (jsn.fi, 2024). There were 739 complaints received, much higher than the previous record of 468 in 2016 (Ibid.). Many of these were rejected as being duplicates of prior complaints about the same issue. As a result, 75 complaints were resolved and there were no appeals from complainants (Ibid.).

### **Other bodies and codes of ethics**

Journalists in Finland follow the Council for Mass Media (CMM) guidelines, called “Guidelines for Journalists and an Annex” (Julkisen sanan neuvosto, January 2014).

Other bodies include the Union of Journalists in Finland (UJF), which was established in 1890 (Suomen Journalistiliitto, 2020b). The union’s structure is composed of 17 member associations, including two national ones, which are the Radio and TV Journalists Union (RTTL), and the association for Finnish freelance journalists (Suomen Journalistiliitto, 2020c). Under the section of its website in English called “Ground Rules”, various aspects of journalism ethics are covered. Here it describes itself as a “key stakeholder” in the CMM, where it is involved in “work to safeguard the development of self-regulation in the media” (Suomen Journalistiliitto, 2020a). The UJF does not have its own code of ethics but adheres

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<sup>4</sup> These organisations are: Finnish Association of Magazines and Periodicals, Finnish Association of Local Periodicals, Finnish Newspapers Association, Union of Journalists in Finland (Finnish Association of Radio and Television Journalists), RadioMedia, MTV3, Sanoma Entertainment, Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE).

to the CMM's guidelines, which it posts on its website (Suomen Journalistiliitto, 2014) (jsn.fi, 2024).

## **Journalism culture**

The Finnish media market has a strong level of journalist professionalisation, where public media are highly valued, and media and politics are separated (Ríos et al., 2018: 228). Finland has a strong tradition of professional culture in journalism, with an emphasis on objectivity and independence (Reunanen, 2018). The majority of journalists in Finland are educated at university level in journalism or communication (Välvirronen et al., 2016: 1).

Reporters without Borders describes the media culture in Finland as a safe environment with rare attacks on journalists (RSF, 2024). Female journalists are most at risk of online harassment and intimidation and diversity of content is impacted by the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the industry (Ibid.). As with other countries, Finnish news organisations are adopting artificial intelligence tools (Reunanen, 2024). Special teams have been set up to work with the new technology, which helps to generate headlines, shorten stories or write summaries (Ibid.).

The most recent Worlds of Journalism Study for Finland ( $n=366$ ) was in 2016. Finnish participants had worked an average of 17.27 years as journalists, with 47.9 per cent of respondents working at specific desks like politics, local news, or sports (Välvirronen et al., 2016: 1). In general, Finnish journalists adhered to a value of factual and objective reporting (Ibid.). In the study, the categories that most participants responded to in terms of values (i.e. more than 50 per cent responding “extremely” and “very important”) were: “Report things as they are” (91.5 per cent,<sup>5</sup> “Be a detached observer” (91.5 per cent), “Provide analysis of current affairs” (85.8 per cent), “Tell stories about the world” (76.9 per cent), “Let people express their views” (69.1 per cent), “Promote tolerance and cultural diversity” (67.5 per cent), “Monitor and scrutinize political leaders” (63.8 per cent), “Provide information people need to make political decisions” (62.3 per cent), “Monitor and scrutinize business” (55.8 per cent), and “Educate the audience” (50.4 per cent) (Ibid.: 2). With regards to professional ethics, almost all of the participants in the study “strongly” or “somewhat agreed” that they must respect codes of professional ethics in every instance (97.8 per cent), and less than half thought “what is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation” (36.2 per cent), a small number thought that “it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it” (15.6 per cent), and a quarter thought that ethics came down to the individual’s judgement (25.8 per cent; Ibid.: 3). Most respondents in the study are members of professional associations (91.3 per cent; Ibid.: 1), and journalism in general was “practised in a typically Western European framework in both political and

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<sup>5</sup> This was also the first response for the Danish respondents.

economic terms” (Jyrkiäinen and Heinonen, 2012: 171). Political journalists in particular, are representatives of the “most ‘sacred part’ of journalism” (Neveu, 2002: 23), citing them as being “elite” journalists that “stand out from others by endorsing the role of analytical independent watchdogs and by maintaining more distance to audiences and commercialism”, and are more ethically “cautious” when using practices that may raise ethical questions (Välvirronen, 2018: 51).

The media are mainly governed by the 2014 Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media Act (Jyrkiäinen and Heinonen, 2012), however, there have been recent studies and discussion of a “growing concern about anticipated deterioration of journalism’s quality and journalists’ working conditions” (Ibid.: 173). In terms of education, journalism programmes are offered at three universities, providing both training from practitioners as well as instruction on theoretical foundations, and added topics from the social sciences; however journalists do not have to be formally trained to work in the profession (Ibid.: 176-177).

In summary, the Finnish media ecology is relatively stable, and this is due to the strength of local and regional press, which provides a balancing effect. Based on the Media Pluralism Monitor for 2017, there are certain threats that need to be addressed, such as protections of whistle-blowers and a perceived need to enforce freedom of information laws (Manninen, 2018: 4), as well as concerns about the decline in the quality of Finnish journalism (Jyrkiäinen and Heinonen, 2012). It is interesting to note, in particular, digital entrant Longplay’s collaboration with Danish and Dutch peers, which suggests that with a stable but saturated news environment, digital entrants must diversify and innovate by looking further afield, in relation to how news content is produced and also consumed. Recent studies have indicated a shift in trust in news, where newsrooms are appearing to become more insular, and “rather than promoting accountability to their audiences through interaction and dialogue, news organisations often appear to work to make their staff more anonymous to their audiences” (Heikkilä and Välvirronen, 2019). This protects journalists from harassment but shifts the nature of media accountability within the production of news (Ibid.).

## **Other information**

### **Governing framework**

Republic (sovereign) (Comparative Constitutions Project, 2018).

### **Parliament**

Riksdag (Harrie, 2018: 58).

### **Seats in parliament**

200 (Eduskunta, 2024).

### **Last election**

April 2, 2023 (BBC, 2024).

### **Seats held by women**

46 per cent (The World Bank, 2024).

### **Ruling party**

National Coalition Party, led by Prime Minister Petteri Orpo (BBC, 2024).

### **Populist party**

*Perussuomalaiset* (Finns Party, formerly True Finns), established in 1995 (Herkman, 2017: 435).

### **Constitutional text on freedom of speech/expression/the press**

**12.** Everyone has the freedom of expression. Freedom of expression entails the right to express, disseminate and receive information, opinions and other communications without prior prevention by anyone. More detailed provisions on the exercise of the freedom of expression are laid down by an Act. Provisions on restrictions relating to pictorial programmes that are necessary for the protection of children may be laid down by an Act (Comparative Constitutions Project, 2018).

### **Media model (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 67)**

*Northern European or Democratic Corporatist Model* (see Appendix E).

### **Key events**

**2017:** A Moroccan asylum-seeker kills two women and injures 8 in the country's first terrorist attack at the main square in Turku (YLE, 2018).

**2017:** Finland celebrates 100 years of independence (YLE, 2017).

**2018:** Helsinki hosts the Trump-Putin summit (Zurcher, 2018).

**2023:** Centre-right National Coalition Party wins the parliamentary elections (Freedom House, 2024)

**2023:** Finland joins North Atlantic Treaty Organisation NATO (Freedom House, 2024)

... [click here for the BBC's recent articles on Finland](#).

... [click here for The Guardian's recent articles on Finland](#).

## **Appendix**

### **Circulation of selected large daily newspapers in Finland in 2020**

| <b>TITLE</b>         | <b>CIRCULATION</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Keskisuomalainen     | 65,347             |
| Savon Sanomat        | 58,516             |
| Ilkka-Phjalainen     | 50,184             |
| Etela-Suomen Sanomat | 39,321             |

|                    |        |
|--------------------|--------|
| Huifvudstadsbladet | 29,623 |
| Etela Saimaa       | 19,007 |
| Kouvola Sanomat    | 17,994 |

(Statista, 2024b) <https://www.statista.com/statistics/569291/finland-daily-newspapers-by-circulation/>

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