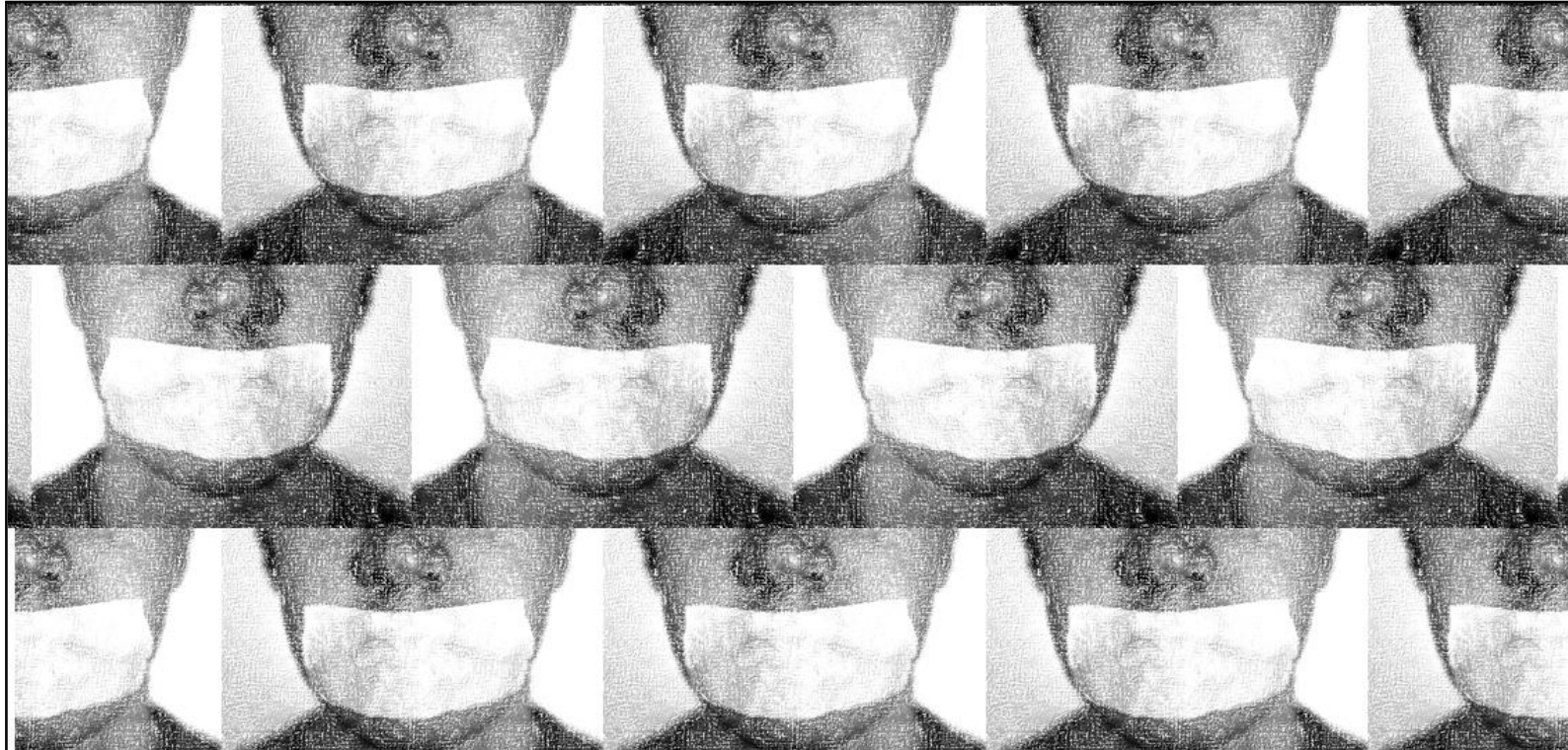


# The News Media Landscape: An overview of the context of Press Freedom and Regulation in Switzerland

Authors: John Steel, Neil Roberts, Julie Firmstone, Charlotte Elliott-Harvey



**Published November, 2024.**

**This report is part of the AHRC funded project “Defining Freedom of the Press: A cross-national examination of press ethics and regulation”**

**Project information, working papers, reports and publications are available online at:** <https://www.derby.ac.uk/departments/humanities/defining-freedom-of-the-press/>

**To cite: Steel, J., Roberts, N., Firmstone, J., Elliott- Harvey, C. (2024) *The News Media Landscape: An overview of the context of Press Freedom and Regulation in Switzerland*. <https://doi.org/10.48785/100/438>**

Reports for the following countries are available [here](#): Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom

Learn more via a free online course: [Understanding Journalism Ethics](#)



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council

**This project received funding from the Arts & Humanities Research Council, under project number [AH/R00644X/1](#), until June 2020. The project term ran from June 2018 to June 2022. This report received additional funding from the School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds.**

**For further information please contact John Steel, [j.steel@derby.ac.uk](mailto:j.steel@derby.ac.uk)**

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

**Copyright for this issue: ©John Steel**

## Abstract

*The News Media Landscape: An Overview of the Context of Press Freedom and Regulation in Switzerland* examines the structure, regulation and cultural context of journalism in Switzerland. 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 outlines constitutional protections for freedom of expression, Switzerland's distinctive federal system and multilingual media environment, and the regulatory and self-regulatory structures governing print, broadcast and online journalism. The report analyses the Swiss media landscape, focusing on media ownership, consolidation, public service broadcasting and market pressures. It also examines audience news consumption, levels of public trust and the growth of digital-only outlets. Further sections explore journalism culture, professional norms, and challenges linked to digitalisation and political debate. The report provides a detailed national case study designed to inform comparative research on press regulation, ethics and media freedom within democratic systems.

## Switzerland

**RSF ranking:** 9<sup>th</sup> out of 180 (RSF, 2024)

**Population:** 8.85m (Worldometer, 2024)

**Percentage in the capital:** 1.52% (134,794); Zurich has more at 4.77% (421,878; Worldometer, 2024)

**GDP:** 885.14bn USD (Statista, 2024)

**EFTA member:** since 1960 (European Free Trade Association, 2018)

**Official languages:** Swiss-German, -French, -Italian, and Romansh (BBC, 2020)

**Press council:** *Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat* (Swiss Press Council)

**Press freedom environment:** Freedom House classes Switzerland as a “free” country with a total score of 96 out of 100 (Freedom House, 2024). This score is split 39/57 for political rights and for civil liberties (Ibid.). The narrative report describes Switzerland as having direct democracy in a decentralised political system. There is respect for political rights and civil liberties although there is some societal and systemic discrimination of ethnic minorities and immigrants. Switzerland is made up of 26 cantons (each with a main national language), that have “significant control over economic and social policy” (Ibid.). Key events in 2023 included a move by the federal government to help UBS buy Credit Suisse, when it was in financial distress, without consulting parliament. The October 2023 election saw victory for the Swiss People's Party (SWP), who sit on the Federal Council in coalition with the

Center (the Christian Democrat People's Party and the Conservative Democratic Party), the Social Democratic Party (SP), and the Liberals (FDP) (Ibid.).

There is a culture of respect for press freedom in an “open media environment” (Freedom House, 2024). This includes the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG/SSR), which is state-owned but also independent and is the foremost news organisation in the country. It is one entity, operating under four translations of its name<sup>1</sup>. Some smaller newspapers have folded in recent years as the result of consolidated ownership by conglomerates. In 2022, Reporters Without Borders criticised a plan to amend the constitution to impose broadcast regulation on new media. The proposal was subsequently rejected (Ibid.). However, attempts to liberalise reporting on banking secrecy have proven unsuccessful and Parliament passed provisional laws to allow judges to block some journalistic content in 2022 (RSF, 2024).

## Media landscape

Situated in Hallin and Mancini’s Northern European or Democratic Corporatist model, Switzerland has a “high degree of professionalisation among journalists”, where there is stress on “the importance of public media in the media sector” and “political power and the media are strictly separated” (Ríos et al., 2018: 228). Press politics in Switzerland is mostly orientated towards “opinion-shaping” and “opinion-forming” orientations (Meier, 2017). Instead of following or supporting particular parties, various news media support political values or principles. For example, NZZ-Gruppe “supports neoliberal policies”, while Ringier and Tamedia “favour bourgeois politics” (Ibid.). The only exceptions are the *Basler Zeitung* and *Weltwoche*, which openly support the National Conservative Swiss People’s Party and are oriented towards “conservative and neoliberal basic values” (Ibid.).

Switzerland is unique in that it is situated in both an international media context with its neighbours: France, Germany, Austria and Italy (Bonfadelli et al., 2012: 320), but also within an inter-lingual context of four national languages: Swiss-French, Swiss-German, Swiss-Italian, and the minority language Romansh. In this way, “linguistic borders within a country also function as cultural borders” (Ibid.). Although there is “harmonisation of the political cultures”, there are still “clear differences” between the different language regions (Ibid.). Therefore, in terms of understanding the media context and journalistic context of Switzerland, these regional and language differences must be taken into consideration (Ibid.). Outside of languages spoken by immigrants (8%), Swiss-German is spoken by most of the population (64%), followed by Swiss-French (19%), Swiss-Italian (8%) and Romansh, which is spoken by less than 1% of the population (Meier, 2017).

---

<sup>1</sup> German: Schweizerische Radio und Fernsehgesellschaft; French: Société Suisse de Radiodiffusion et Television; Italian: Società Svizzera di Radiotelevisione; Romansh: Societad Svizra da Radio e Televisiun.

## Newspapers and market

Commercial news organisations are juggling cost savings with the search for more revenue (Udris and Eisenegger, 2024). Conglomerates TX Group and Ringier all announced considerable job cuts in 2023. CH Media also made substantial cuts and centralised their news operations (Ibid.). Declining sales and consolidated ownership have dominated the newspaper market in recent years. Every daily newspaper in Switzerland which sells more than 50,000 copies is now owned by a multimedia company (Meier, 2017). This is in line with more recent reports of consolidated news media in Switzerland (Freedom House, 2024) (Newman et al., 2024) and the decrease in local and regional news outlets has continued for a generation. Between 1992 and 2012, there was a decrease of 40% of these publications to 76 “titles” (Bonfadelli et al., 2012: 320). Since 2018, *Zentralschweiz am Sonntag* and *Ostschweiz am Sonntag* have folded and *Blick am Abend* and *SonntagsZeitung* have moved online (Eurotopics, 2024) (SwissInfo, 2019). As well as closures, news corporations have moved towards free online or paid-for subscription models. In terms of remaining print publications, the five largest newspapers by average circulation for 2023 were: *20 Minuten* (Swiss-German edition; 330k), *20 Minutes* (Swiss-French edition; 137k), *Nordwestschweiz* (107k), and *Tages-Anzeiger* (103k) (Statista, 2024) *Der Bund* also recorded a circulation of over 100,000. (Ibid.).

In his Media Landscapes report, Meier (2017) named Tamedia as the major operator in the market and this continues. Tamedia own many regional newspapers including *24heures* and the tabloid *Le Matin* and *Tribune de Genève* (Ibid.). Other surviving newspapers published by Tamedia include *Tages-Anzeiger*, the *Berner Zeitung* and *Der Bund* (Ibid.). They also publish the big circulation free titles listed above, including the German *20 Minuten*, French *20 minutes* and Italian, *20 minuti*. Other significant media conglomerates include the NZZ media group, which has a range of Sunday and regional papers as well as its flagship quality newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Meier, 2017). Other surviving publications in its stable include *Neue Luzerner Zeitung* and *St. Galler Tagblatt* (Ibid.). Its former titles *Zentralschweiz am Sonntag* and *Ostschweiz am Sonntag* were closed in 2019 (SwissInfo, 2019). Ringier AG is another major publishing company in Switzerland (Meier, 2017). It owns the daily tabloid *Blick* (distinct from the online-only *Blick am Abend*) as well as various free, Sunday and daily titles. Ringier also publishes the weekly news magazine *Schweizer Illustrierte* and the daily newspaper *Le Temps* in the French-speaking region of Switzerland (Ibid.). It closed *Blick am Abend* as a print edition in 2018 (Eurotopics, 2024).

In 2012, Switzerland was described as having a “relatively high number of journalists per capita” with around 136 per 100,000 individuals (Bonfadelli et al., 2012: 324). However, recent studies from the Reuters Institute (2024) and Freedom House (2024) indicate that media diversity has reduced in line with consolidation (Udris and Eisenegger, 2019). Tamedia has centralised its newsrooms for its Swiss-

French and Swiss-German brands, although it does have additional newsrooms for the national free newspapers *20 Minutes/Minuten* (Ibid.). Udris and Eisenegger (2019) describe the trend towards consolidated ownership and reduced diversity as highly problematic. With its unique direct democracy, Switzerland often has several referendums a year, which means a high degree of importance is placed on offering a wide range of views. It is perhaps unsurprising that the decline in print media coincides with high internet penetration of 94 per cent (Newman et al., 2024).

### **Audience news consumption**

Swiss people are becoming less interested in news and 40 per cent of the population are now “news deprived” (Udris and Eisenegger, 2024). News consumption on every platform has declined since 2016 with a growing “news deprived” population on the rise (Udris and Eisenegger, 2024). The Reuters Digital News Report figures for 2024 show 74 per cent sourcing stories online and just 34 per cent reading print media (Newman et al., 2024). The Reuters report (2024) combines results of weekly usage across television, radio, and print, as well as online in Switzerland (Newman et al., 2024: 108). These are split between the majority Swiss-German speaking portion of the population, and the secondary Swiss-French speaking portion of the population. On the Swiss-German side, the main public broadcaster SRF ranks at the top at 59 per cent for TV, radio, and print (down from 67 per cent in 2019). It is second in the online figures, with 22 per cent, behind the online news market leader *20 Minuten*, which reached 44 per cent of German speakers online as well as 40 per cent in the TV, radio and print listings. Blick Online, incorporating the closed newspaper *Blick am Abend*, has 27 per cent reach in the web space, while its remaining *Blick* print edition attracts 16 per cent of users, behind German public and private TV news (Ibid.). It is a similar picture among the French-speaking population of Switzerland. The public broadcaster RTS News leads the field for TV, radio and print with 61 per cent reach, while also claiming 26 per cent of the online audience. Here, the leader is again *20 Minuten* (47 per cent), which is also second to RTS on 44 per cent in the weekly usage figures for TV, radio and print. Next on the list are French private, public and TV news followed (as they are with German speakers) by regional or local newspapers (Ibid.).

### **Public service media**

The public broadcaster is SRG SSR, with its central studio in Zurich (Udris and Eisenegger, 2019). It is tasked with providing programmes in all regions (Udris and Eisenegger, 2024). Its brands SRF (German speaking) and RTS (French speaking) are leaders in public usage and trust and combined, must provide programming in all regions (Ibid.). The SRG SSR is partially funded for television, and fully funded for radio by the Swiss Federal Council, and it must serve all of Switzerland’s language populations equally, that is the Swiss-German/French/Italian populations (Meier, 2017). National licensing enables the smaller languages of the

SRG SSR to be properly funded through “cross-subsidies”, which is framed a “contribution to national solidarity” (Ibid.).

Some of the public broadcaster’s licence fee revenues from German-speaking areas help subsidise the smaller language regions (Udris and Eisenegger, 2024). However, the licence fee has proven contentious and a potential referendum in 2026, successfully launched by right-wing politicians, may halve the broadcaster’s public revenues (Ibid.). There is a counter government proposal for a more limited reduction but even if adopted, the SRG SSR fear a budget cut of around 15 per cent (Ibid.).

### **Public trust in the press and media**

The public broadcaster SRG SSR is the most trusted news brand, although it faces challenges’ with the prospect of substantial budget cuts (Udris and Eisenegger, 2024). According to the Reuters Digital News (2024), overall trust in Swiss news was at 41 per cent, marking a three-year decline, particularly among German-speaking Swiss (Newman et al., 2024: 109). The report ranks Switzerland 18<sup>th</sup> out of 41 markets for media trust. The public broadcaster ranks highest in both French and German-speaking areas, with 73 per cent trusting news on RTS (French) and 72 per cent trusting SRF (German). Regional or local newspapers (67 per cent) were the next most trusted news sources in German-speaking areas, followed by broadsheet newspapers *NZZ* (66 per cent) and *Tages Anzeiger* (64 per cent). Trust ratings in the French-speaking areas saw RTS followed by quality newspapers *Le Temps* (65 per cent) and *24 Heures* (63 per cent), alongside other regional or local newspapers (63 per cent). Across both communities, the lowest-ranked news organisations for trust included online providers MSN (German; 36 per cent. French; 33 per cent), Yahoo (French; 32 per cent) and GMX (German; 33 per cent) (Ibid.). The issue of trust in the media has become topical, with the emergence of artificial intelligence as a key newsroom tool (Udris and Eisenegger, 2024). One survey has indicated Swiss people would not be willing to pay for news generated artificially (Ibid.).

Most of the other News Media Landscape documents include data from the Eurobarometer Media & News Survey for 2023. As a non-EU member, Switzerland was not included in their study.

### **Online only/digital entrants**

Only a fifth of more than 300 news media outlets in Switzerland are solely dedicated to online operations (Udris and Eisenegger, 2024). Watson, launched in 2014, has emerged as one of the key players in the online news market, especially among Swiss-German speakers. In that demographic, it is the most-used online-only news outlet (Newman et al., 2024), with 19 per cent reach. Its nearest rivals are Blue News (15 per cent), nau.ch (12 per cent), GMX (11 per cent) and Teletext online (9 per cent). The crowd-funded digital magazine news provider Republik doesn’t

yet feature. It launched in 2018 to provide longform news pieces (Udris and Eisenegger, 2019). The Reuters Digital News Report (2024) also clarifies usage figures in the online market among Swiss-French speakers. Heidi.news, launched as a French-speaking online news service in 2019, is yet to make an impact on the figures for audience reach. Here, the leader is Blue News (used by 15 per cent), followed by Teletext online (13 per cent) and the emerging Watson platform (9 per cent). Others listed include Yahoo (9 per cent), CNN (9 per cent) and MSN (8 per cent).

### **Additional context**

In the latest RSF rankings, Switzerland is ranked 9<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries on the 2024 World Press Freedom Index, a drop from 6<sup>th</sup> in 2019 but up from 12<sup>th</sup> in 2023 (RSF, 2024). According to the 2024 Digital News Report, overall trust in Swiss news was at 41%, with Switzerland ranking 18<sup>th</sup> out of the 47 countries in the study (Newman et al., 2024: 109). Internet penetration is at 91% (Ibid.: 108).

The ongoing Worlds of Journalism studies have yet to update their country report on Switzerland. Reporting in 2016, it stated that Swiss journalists are trained, many with a university degree (69.6%), or with a specialised degree in journalism or communication studies (47.3%) (Dingerkus et al., 2016).

### **Regulatory environment**

The World Press Freedom Index states that journalists work in a regulatory environment that is mostly respectful of press freedom (RSF, 2024). However, problems persist. Parliament passed provisional laws to allow judges to block some journalistic content in 2022, while attempts to liberalise reporting on banking secrecy were unsuccessful (Ibid.). Publishers are pushing for new legislation to force technology platforms to pay copyright fees for “link previews and news snippets” (Udris and Eisenegger, 2024).

Accountable Journalism lists two regulatory bodies for Switzerland: The Independent Complaints Authority for Radio and Television (ICA; l’Autorité indépendante d’examen des plaintes en matière de radio-télévision), and the Swiss Press Council (Accountable Journalism, 2017). The ICA (2023) describes itself as an “extra-parliamentary federal commission which rules on complaints” against the following:

- Radio and television programmes provided by national, regional and local Swiss broadcasters,
- Other journalistic material published by the national broadcaster, SRG SSR, encompassing online content, Teletext bulletins, programme-related information, international news and

information services, and accompanying material for individual programmes,

- Refused access to a radio or television programme (editorial content or publicity) of a Swiss broadcaster,
- Refused access to the editorial content of other journalistic services provided by SRG SSR.

Proceedings are publicly accessible, and the ICA decides on whether or not a complaint constitutes an infraction of domestic or international law, and appeals must be made to the Federal Supreme Court. However, the relevant ombudsman determines whether or not a complaint should be escalated to the ICA first (Ibid.).

The current regulatory framework in Switzerland can be traced to 1972, when the Declaration of the Duties and Rights of Journalists was asserted by the Swiss Press Association in Bern (Jones, 1980). It followed the principles of the International Federation of Journalists, which was based in Brussels (Jones, 1980: 32) and described Switzerland as not needing a “media council” at the time of writing, because of the relationship between various media organisations working alongside local government. The Association claimed this relationship combined “satisfactorily those two elements which are often said to be irreconcilable – absolute freedom and a highly developed sense of responsibility.” These organisations were: The Swiss Press Association, Swiss Editors Association, Swiss-Romandie Association, and the Swiss Radio and Television Association, which had their own internal codes of ethics (Ibid.).

### **The press council<sup>2</sup>**

The Swiss Press Council was established in 1977 (Ríos et al., 2018: 226). It describes itself as serving the public and media professionals as a complaints body (Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024) as well as being “the appeal body for the public and journalists on questions relating to journalistic ethics” (Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024k). It ensures compliance with its code of ethics, which is applicable to all journalists (Ibid.). The press council also positions itself as “[defending] freedom of speech and freedom of the press”, as well as contributing to “reflection and debate” on “fundamental questions on media ethics” (Ibid.). By “[guaranteeing] self-regulation of the media sector”, the press council assesses infringement of the code of ethics for journalistic work published in the press, radio, television, and online (Ibid.).

The press council has 21 members, 15 of whom are journalists, six of these are members of the public that do not work in journalism (Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024i). The four national languages of Switzerland are also represented in the press council. The membership work with ombudsmen (*médiateurs*) from

---

<sup>2</sup> Parts of this section were translated using Google Translate

Swiss media organisations, foreign press councils, and other bodies (Ibid.). An overarching foundation board ensures that the press council is financed and has facilities, and it was founded by six key organisations: Impressum (national journalist association), Schweizer Syndikat Medienschaffender, Syndicom, Association Conférence des rédactrices et rédacteurs en chef, Association Médias Suisses, and the SSR (Ibid.; for a list of funds contributed, see: Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024f). This foundation has 18 members, and membership is allocated according to how much each organisation contributes to the foundation (Ibid.). The secretariat of the press council organises the casework of the 21 members of the press council, who are split into three working groups (*chambres*), and acts as the point of contact for all parties involved: complainants, journalists, publishers, collaborators, and members of the public (Ibid.; for further details on the structure of the press council, see: Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024j). The press council is a member of the Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe (AIPCE), but does not describe its involvement in the AIPCE (Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024g).

The press council's "code of conduct" was available online in English at the time of writing, and these comprise of two documents that make one whole: a "Declaration" that includes the "Declaration of Duties of a Journalist" and the "Declaration of Rights of a Journalist", as well as the "Directives relating to the 'Declaration of the Duties and Rights of the Journalist'" (Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024c; Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024e).

Anyone can bring a complaint to the press council without charge, regarding editorial contributions to newspapers, magazines, online media and other electronic media like radio and television (Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024d). The complaint must be filed within three months, and in addition to all relevant details about the case, the complainant must explain which part of the code of ethics the complaint refers to, as well as indicating if legal proceedings are either underway in tandem with the complaint, or if there is an intention to continue with legal proceedings once the press council has reached an eventual decision (Ibid.). There are no sanction procedures and decisions are published on the press council's website (Ibid.).

According to MEDIAACT (2014), the Swiss Press Council and its tradition of self-regulation had a higher impact on journalist behaviour than in other countries in the study (Ríos et al., 2018: 232).

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

A database of decisions reached is available to the public in the languages in which the decisions were made, going back to 1990 (Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024a). A list of "milestones" explains why decisions were taken for a given case, as a way of setting a precedent for the press council's caseworking (Geschäftsstelle

Schweizer Presserat, 2024h), which was described in another part of the press council's website (Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024i).

In 2020, the press council handled more cases than ever before, with a total of 98 decisions reached (Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024a).<sup>3</sup> In early 2024, the Swiss Press Council urged journalists to exercise caution when using AI and to make sure any pieces created with the technology should be labelled as such (SwissInfo, 2024).

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

Impressum, which is an association for Swiss journalists, indicates that journalists that are registered and have press cards must abide by the press council's codes of ethics, and that the press council is "responsible for the application of these rules" (Impressum, 2020). The SFJ, which is an association for specialist journalists and is only available in Swiss-German (SFJ, 2020), does not make reference to codes of ethics (*Journalistenkodex*), or the press council (*presserat*).

### **Journalism culture**

The RSF describes Switzerland as providing a safe environment for journalists, albeit one that has calmed down since activist attacks during Covid (RSF, 2024). It finds that journalists are sheltered from political pressure, with particularly strong safeguards in place in public sector broadcasting (Ibid.). However, there is some cultural pressure from civic society. In 2021, some feminist and LGBT group members intimidated journalists and harassed them to take down content, in one case causing material damage to a media outlet's cars (Ibid.).

As with other countries, the newsroom culture is being challenged by digital journalism and there are new industry-wide guidelines covering the use of artificial intelligence (Udris and Eisenegger, 2024). Major brands in the media market have installed heads of AI or created specialist departments, despite scepticism in wider Swiss society, with a survey indicating a lack of willingness to pay for AI news (Udris and Eisenegger, 2024).

There are few studies on journalist role perceptions and journalism culture that exist before the late 1990s. The first study from 1998 showed that journalists in Switzerland share common threads with journalists from the European and North American contexts, though with certain exceptions that had to do with cultural insulation preventing any overall economic pressures due to a "strongly segmented Swiss media landscape" (Bonfadelli et al., 2012: 321). Additionally, Swiss journalists tended to be in an older age demographic than other countries compared at that time and context (France, Germany, USA), and it was not

---

<sup>3</sup> See appendix for numbers of cases handled by the Swiss Press Council

uncommon for journalists to not be formally trained (Ibid.). A second study from 2008 comprised of three online surveys with 2,509 journalists working for private broadcasters, the public broadcaster, and print media (Ibid.: 322). The study found that although there were changes with how media organisations are structured and how media are consumed, journalistic norms and environments remained stable (Ibid.: 329). Key shifts had to do with the increase in training for younger journalists as well as increased commercialisation of news, including the popularity of free newspapers; as well as the prevalence of the internet and the use of it as a “central tool” for “journalistic production” and the increase of job instability due to the financial crisis at that time (Ibid.).

In the most recent Worlds of Journalism Study (2016) for Switzerland ( $n=909$ ), Swiss participants had worked an average of 14.62 years as journalists, with 47.8 per cent of respondents working at specific desks like politics, local news, or sports (Dingerkus et al., 2016: 1). In general, Swiss journalists adhere 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” (94.4 per cent), “Provide analysis of current affairs” (84 per cent), “Be a detached observer” (82.8 per cent), “Provide information people need to make political decisions” (68.9 per cent), “Let people express their views” (56.1 per cent), “Tell stories about the world” (55.2 per cent), and “Promote tolerance and cultural diversity” (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 (91.3 per cent), while about half thought that “what is ethical in journalism, depends on the specific situation” (51.4 per cent). A small number thought that “it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it” (17.7 per cent), and about the same number thought that ethics came down to the individual’s judgement (17.7 per cent) (Ibid.: 3).

## **Other information**

### **Governing framework**

Confederation (Comparative Constitutions Project, 2018)  
Switzerland has a system of direct democracy (BBC, 2023)

### **Parliament**

The Federal Assembly.

Government is organised on three hierarchies: federal, cantonal (state), and local (Meier, 2017).

### **Seats in parliament**

Council of States: 46, and National Council: 200 (ParlCH, 2016: 00:01:15)

### **Last election**

22 October 2023 (CH, 2023)

### **Seats held by women**

38.5% (The World Bank, 2024)

### **Party system**

Cabinet: Collective 7-member head of State (BBC, 2023)

Parliamentary Groups, read more here ([click for link](#))

### **Populist party**

Swiss People's Party (Kleiner, 2018)

### **Origins of key minority groups**

Turkey, the former Yugoslavia; Islam is second-largest religion after Christianity; Roughly 25% of the population is composed of non-citizens (2.1 million) (Minority Rights, 2023).

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

16.1. Freedom of expression and of information is guaranteed. 16.2. Every person has the right freely to form, express, and impart their opinions. 17.1. Freedom of the press, radio and television and of other forms of dissemination of features and information by means of public telecommunications is guaranteed. 21. Freedom of artistic expression is guaranteed. 34.2. The guarantee of political rights protects the freedom of the citizen to form an opinion and to give genuine expression to his or her will. 93.2. Radio and television shall contribute to education and cultural development, to the free shaping of opinion and to entertainment. They shall take account of the particularities of the country and the needs of the Cantons. They shall present events accurately and allow a diversity of opinions to be expressed appropriately. 93.4. Account must be taken of the role and duties of other media, in particular the press (Comparative Constitutions Project, 2018).

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

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

### **Key events**

**2009:** Referendum bans minarets with 57.5 per cent in favour (Wyler, 2017).

**2017:** Referendum allows third-generation immigrants to acquire citizenship easier (BBC, 2023).

**2018:** Referendum rejects banning licensing fees supporting public broadcasting (BBC, 2023).

**2021:** Referendum supports legalising same-sex marriages with 64.1 per cent in favour (BBC, 2023)

**2022:** Referendum bans tobacco advertising on platforms accessible to children (BBC, 2023).

**2022:** Referendum rejects proposal to extend media subsidies to larger circulation newspapers, online media, local radio stations and regional television

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

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

## Appendix

### Cases handled by the Swiss Press Council

2014: 44

2015: 60

2016: 51

2017: 53

2018: 62

2019: 83

2020: 98

2021: 81

2022: 53

2023: 49

(Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat, 2024a)

## Bibliography

Accountable Journalism. 2017. Switzerland. August, 21, 2017. [Online]. Available from: <https://accountablejournalism.org/press-councils/Switzerland>.

BBC. 2023. Switzerland country profile. June 19, 2023. *BBC - Europe*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17980650>.

Bonfadelli, H., Keel, G., Marr, M. and Wyss, V. 2012. Journalists in Switzerland: Structure and attitudes. In: Weaver, D.H. and Willnat, L. eds. *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century*. [Online]. pp.320-330. Available from: DawsonERA.

CH. 2023. Elections 2023. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.ch.ch/en/elections2023/>.

Comparative Constitutions Project. 2018. Switzerland's Constitution of 1999 with Amendments through 2014 (Subsequently amended). [Online]. Available from: [https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Switzerland\\_2014.pdf](https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Switzerland_2014.pdf).

Dingerkus, F., Keel, G. and Wyss, V. 2016. Country Report: Journalists in Switzerland. *Worlds of Journalism Study*. [Online]. Available from: [https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/30991/1/Dingerkus\\_Keel\\_Journalists\\_in\\_Switzerland.pdf](https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/30991/1/Dingerkus_Keel_Journalists_in_Switzerland.pdf).

European Free Trade Association. 2018. EFTA through the years. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.efta.int/About-EFTA/EFTA-through-years-747>.

Eurotopics. 2024. European Press Round-Up. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.eurotopics.net/en/148425/blick>

- Freedom House. 2019. Switzerland: profile [2019]. *Freedom in the World 2019*. [Online]. Available from: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/switzerland/freedom-world/2019>.
- Freedom House. 2024. Switzerland: profile [2024]. *Freedom in the World 2024*. [Online]. Available from: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/switzerland/freedom-world/2024>.
- Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat. 2018. Rapport Annuel 2018: du conseil Suisse de la presse [Annual Report 2018 of the Swiss press council]. [Online]. Available from: [https://presserat.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Jahresbericht\\_Schweizer\\_Presserat\\_2018\\_F.pdf](https://presserat.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Jahresbericht_Schweizer_Presserat_2018_F.pdf).
- Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat. 2024a. Complaints. [Online]. Available from: <https://presserat.ch/complaints/>.
- Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat. 2024b. Conseil de la presse plus sollicité que jamais [Press Council more in demand than ever before]. [Online]. Available from: <https://presserat.ch/fr/conseil-de-la-presse-plus-sollicite-que-jamais/>.
- Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat. 2024c. Declaration. [Online]. Available from: <https://presserat.ch/en/journalistenkodex/erklaerungen/>.
- Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat. 2024d. Déroulement d'une plainte [Complaints procedure]. [Online]. Available from: <https://presserat.ch/en/der-presserat/geschaeftsreglement/>.
- Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat. 2024e. Directives relating to the 'Declaration of the Duties and Rights of the Journalist'. [Online]. Available from: <https://presserat.ch/en/journalistenkodex/richtlinien/>.
- Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat. 2024f. Financement [Financing]. [Online]. Available from: <https://presserat.ch/fr/le-conseil-de-la-presse/financement/>.
- Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat. 2024g. International. [Online]. Available from: <https://presserat.ch/fr/le-conseil-de-la-presse/9758-2/>.
- Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat. 2024h. Milestones [PDF]. [Online]. Available from: [https://presserat.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Meilensteine\\_fr.pdf](https://presserat.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Meilensteine_fr.pdf).
- Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat. 2024i. Organisation. [Online]. Available from: <https://presserat.ch/fr/le-conseil-de-la-presse/organisation/>.
- Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat. 2024j. Règlement du Conseil suisse de la presse [Rules of the Swiss Press Council]. [Online]. Available from: <https://presserat.ch/fr/le-conseil-de-la-presse/reglement-du-conseil-suisse-de-la-presse/>.
- Geschäftsstelle Schweizer Presserat. 2024k. Tâches [Tasks]. [Online]. Available from: <https://presserat.ch/fr/le-conseil-de-la-presse/taches/>.
- Hallin, D.C. and Mancini, P. 2004. *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. [Online]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available from: ACLS Humanities eBook.
- ICA. 2023. The Independent Complaints Authority for Radio and Television. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.ubi.admin.ch/en/ica-homepage/>.
- Impressum. 2020. Déontologie See: <https://www.impressum.ch/fr/mes-droits-cct/journalisme/deontologie/>.

- Jones, J.C. 1980. *Mass media codes of ethics and councils: A comparative international study on professional standards*. [Online]. Paris: UNESCO. Available from: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0004/000423/042302Eo.pdf>.
- Kleiner, F. 2018. Switzerland has been a lab for toxic rightwing politics. We took that on. November 15, 2018 at 17:55. *The Guardian - Opinion*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/15/switzerland-laboratory-far-right-politics>.
- MEDIAACT. 2014. Final Report Summary - Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe (MEDIAACT). August 29, 2014. *Seventh Framework Programme (EU)*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.mediaact.eu/>.
- Meier, W.A. 2017. Switzerland. *Media Landscapes*. [Online]. Available from: <https://medialandscapes.org/country/switzerland>.
- Minority Rights. 2023. Switzerland - Minorities and indigenous peoples. [Online]. Available from: <https://minorityrights.org/country/switzerland/>.
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Robertson, C.T., Arguedas, A.R. and Nielsen, R.K. 2024. Reuters Institute Digital News Report. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*. [Online]. Available from: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024>.
- ParlCH. 2016. "Tell me about Parliament". February 18, 2016. *YouTube*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uh8ZIMEYBLk&feature=youtu.be>.
- Ríos, M.M.i.d.l., Rodríguez-Martínez, R., Maz, M.F. and Fedele, M. 2018. Press councils as a traditional instrument of media self-regulation: The perceptions of European journalists. *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*. **7**(2), pp.221-243. DOI: 10.1386/ajms.7.2.221\_1.
- RSF. 2019. World Press Freedom Index. [Online]. Available from: <https://rsf.org/en/>.
- RSF. 2024. World Press Freedom Index - Switzerland. [Online]. Available from: <https://rsf.org/en/switzerland>.
- SFJ. 2020. [home]. See: <http://www.sfj-ajs.ch/de/home/>.
- Statista. 2024. Switzerland - Statistics & Facts. July 9, 2024. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.statista.com/topics/1614/switzerland/>.
- Statista. 2024b. Ranking of daily newspapers with the highest average circulation in Switzerland in 2021/2022 and 2022/2023. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/701430/daily-newspapers-highest-circulation-switzerland/>.
- SwissInfo. 2019. CH Media cuts two Sunday newspapers and staff. March 19, 2019. [Online]. Available from: [http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/business/swiss-media\\_ch-media-cuts-two-sunday-newspapers-and-staff/44835076](http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/business/swiss-media_ch-media-cuts-two-sunday-newspapers-and-staff/44835076)
- SwissInfo. 2024. Switzerland's Press Council advises caution with AI. March 6, 2024. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/science/switzrlands-press-council-advises-caution-with-ai/73410948>

- The World Bank. 2024. Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%) - Switzerland. *Data*. [Online]. Available from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?locations=CH>.
- Udris, L. and Eisenegger, M. 2019. Switzerland. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism - Digital News Report 2019*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/switzerland-2019/>.
- Udris, L. and Eisenegger, M. 2024. Switzerland. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism - Digital News Report 2024*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/switzerland-2024/>.
- Worldometer. 2024. Switzerland Population (2024). July 9, 2024. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/switzerland-population/>.
- Wyler, D. 2017. The Swiss minaret ban referendum and Switzerland's international reputation: A vote with an impact. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. 37(4), pp.413-425. DOI: 10.1080/13602004.2017.1405506.

## **Defining Freedom of the Press: A cross-national examination of press ethics and regulation**

Working Papers and reports are available online at: [defining-freedom-of-the-press.info](http://defining-freedom-of-the-press.info)



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council

This project received funding from the Arts & Humanities Research Council, under project number [AH/R00644X/1](#), until June 2020. The project term ran from June 2018 to July 2024.

For further information please contact John Steel, [j.steel@derby.ac.uk](mailto:j.steel@derby.ac.uk)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Copyright for this issue: ©John Steel