

Journalism Cultures in Indonesia Differ in Autonomy, Ethics, Roles, and Institutions

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Abstract

This study examines Indonesian journalism culture using aggregated country-level data from the *Worlds of Journalism Study Wave 2* (WJS2). It focuses on four main dimensions: editorial autonomy, ethical orientation, journalistic roles, and institutional influences. Methodologically, the study applies quantitative secondary data analysis through descriptive statistics, cross-national comparison, z-score standardization, country ranking, and composite profiling. Since the WJS2 data are available at the country level, this study does not seek to draw individual-level causal inferences, but rather to map Indonesia's comparative position within the global distribution of journalism cultures. The findings show that Indonesian journalism is marked by a hybrid professional culture. Indonesian journalists strongly endorse professional codes of ethics and factual reporting, indicating a relatively solid normative professional identity. However, they also report limited editorial autonomy, particularly in selecting stories and determining which aspects of stories should be emphasized. Role-orientation results suggest that Indonesian journalism cannot be fully explained through the liberal-watchdog model, as factual reporting, political monitoring, and support for national development coexist. Thus, Indonesian journalism culture can be understood as ethically normative, factually oriented, developmentally aware, and institutionally constrained. The article contributes to comparative journalism studies by positioning Indonesia in debates on professionalism, autonomy, and contemporary media change.

Keywords: *Journalism Culture; Indonesian Journalism; Editorial Autonomy; Journalistic Roles; Worlds of Journalism Study*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji budaya jurnanisme Indonesia dengan menggunakan data agregat tingkat negara dari *Worlds of Journalism Study Wave 2* (WJS2). Kajian berfokus pada empat dimensi utama, yaitu otonomi editorial, orientasi etis, peran jurnalistik, dan pengaruh institusional. Secara metodologis, penelitian ini menerapkan analisis data sekunder kuantitatif melalui statistik deskriptif, perbandingan lintas negara, standardisasi z-score, pemeringkatan negara, serta penyusunan profil komposit. Karena data WJS2 tersedia dalam bentuk agregat pada tingkat negara, penelitian ini tidak bertujuan menarik inferensi kausal pada tingkat individu, melainkan memetakan posisi komparatif Indonesia dalam distribusi global budaya jurnanisme. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa jurnanisme Indonesia memiliki karakter profesional yang hibrida. Jurnalis Indonesia memperlihatkan dukungan kuat terhadap kode etik profesi dan pelaporan faktual, yang menandakan identitas profesional normatif yang relatif kokoh. Namun, mereka juga melaporkan otonomi editorial yang terbatas, terutama dalam memilih berita dan menentukan aspek yang perlu ditekankan. Orientasi peran menunjukkan bahwa jurnanisme Indonesia tidak sepenuhnya mengikuti model liberal-watchdog, karena pelaporan faktual, pengawasan politik, dan dukungan terhadap pembangunan nasional berjalan bersamaan. Dengan demikian, budaya jurnanisme Indonesia dapat dipahami sebagai etis-normatif, faktual, berorientasi pembangunan, sekaligus dibatasi oleh struktur institusional. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada kajian jurnanisme komparatif dengan menempatkan Indonesia dalam perdebatan tentang profesionalisme, otonomi, dan perubahan media global kontemporer secara lebih empiris.

Kata kunci: Budaya Jurnanisme; Jurnanisme Indonesia; Otonomi Editorial; Peran Jurnalistik; *Worlds of Journalism Study*

INTRODUCTION

Journalism does not develop in a vacuum of universal professional norms. In every media system, journalists negotiate their work through specific configurations of political authority, market pressure, newsroom hierarchy, ownership structure, technological change, and public expectation. These conditions shape how journalists understand autonomy, define ethical boundaries, imagine professional roles, and respond to institutional influence. Comparative journalism scholarship has therefore moved beyond treating journalism as a homogeneous profession and increasingly examines journalism culture as a situated configuration of professional values, practices, and constraints across national and regional contexts (Deuze, 2005; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Hanitzsch, 2007; Waisbord, 2013).

Journalism culture is analytically important because journalists may share similar professional vocabularies while attaching different meanings to them. Concepts such as independence, objectivity, public service, neutrality, accountability, and watchdog journalism appear universal, but their practical meanings are shaped by media systems, professional histories, state–media relations, newsroom routines, and the political economy of news production. Comparative studies have shown that journalists differ across countries in how they value interventionism, objectivism, ethical idealism, power distance, market orientation, and public-service responsibility (Hanitzsch, 2007, 2011). This perspective challenges the assumption that liberal-democratic journalism, with its emphasis on autonomy and watchdog functions, should serve as the default model for evaluating all journalistic cultures (Veltmer, 2013; Waisbord, 2013).

This study approaches journalism culture through four interrelated dimensions: editorial autonomy, ethical orientation, journalistic roles, and institutional influences. Editorial autonomy refers to journalists' perceived freedom to select stories, determine angles, emphasize particular aspects of events, and resist undue influence from political, economic, organizational, or social actors (Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Yet autonomy is not merely an individual attitude; it is structured by newsroom hierarchies, editorial routines, ownership arrangements, political pressures, legal frameworks, organizational resources, and broader political-media conditions (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013). Ethical orientation, meanwhile, concerns how journalists justify reporting practices, define acceptable methods, evaluate public interest, and negotiate tensions between truth-seeking, harm avoidance, independence, loyalty, and accountability (Christians et al., 2009; Plaisance, 2014; Ward, 2010, 2015). Comparative research shows that journalists differ in their commitment to universal ethical codes and situational ethical judgment, indicating that journalism ethics reflects both professional doctrine and institutional context (Berkowitz et al., 2004; Hanitzsch, 2011; Sanders, 2003).

Journalistic roles and institutional influences further clarify how journalism culture operates in practice. Role perceptions refer to whether journalists see themselves as detached observers, neutral disseminators, watchdogs, interpreters, mobilizers, advocates, educators, or supporters of national development (Donsbach, 2008; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Mellado, 2015). Recent studies show that journalistic roles are multiple, contested, and culturally situated, and that journalism should be understood beyond the narrow frame of liberal democracy because journalists also operate in everyday-life domains and political contexts where service, collaboration, monitoring, and intervention often overlap (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2017). Research on journalistic role performance likewise shows that professional ideals and actual practices do not always align, and that news cultures often combine several role orientations within the same media system (Mellado, 2015). At the same time, the hierarchy-of-influences perspective shows that news production is shaped by individual journalists, newsroom routines, organizational structures, extra-media forces, and ideological contexts (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, 2014). In contemporary media systems, these pressures are intensified by editorial supervision, ownership, advertisers, political actors, audience feedback, competing news organizations, platform infrastructures, audience metrics, and algorithmic visibility (Anderson, 2011; Carlson, 2018; Coddington, 2015; Tandoc, 2014).

Indonesia offers an important case for examining journalism culture because its media system has changed profoundly since the end of the New Order regime in 1998. The post-authoritarian period brought press liberalization, expansion of private media, growth of investigative reporting, and greater openness in public communication. However, democratization did not produce a simple transition toward fully autonomous liberal journalism. Indonesian journalism has developed within a complex environment marked by media commercialization, political ownership, oligarchic influence, weak labor protections, uneven professional standards, and rapid digital disruption (Hill & Sen, 2005; Lim, 2012; Romano, 2003; Sen & Hill, 2000; Tapsell, 2015, 2017). Media ownership is particularly relevant in this context because a relatively small number of powerful conglomerates have controlled much of the country's media infrastructure, raising concerns about viewpoint diversity, editorial independence, and the relationship between media power and political-economic interests (Lim, 2012; Tapsell, 2015, 2017). Thus, Indonesian journalists may formally operate within a democratic media environment while still facing organizational, commercial, ownership-related, and institutional pressures that shape editorial decisions.

Despite the growing literature on Indonesian media, systematic comparative analysis of Indonesian journalism culture using cross-national data remains limited. Existing studies have provided important accounts of media reform, ownership concentration, press freedom, digital activism, political communication, and the political economy of Indonesian media (Hill & Sen, 2005; Lim, 2012; Romano, 2003; Sen & Hill, 2000; Tapsell, 2015, 2017). However, fewer studies position Indonesia within a global comparative framework that simultaneously examines editorial autonomy, ethical orientation, journalistic roles, and institutional influences. This gap matters because Indonesia is often interpreted as a post-authoritarian or Southeast Asian media case, but less frequently mapped against broader global patterns of journalism culture.

The present study addresses this gap by pursuing four specific research objectives. First, it evaluates the level of editorial autonomy reported by Indonesian journalists and compares Indonesia's position with global patterns. Second, it examines the ethical orientations of Indonesian journalists, particularly their support for professional ethical principles and their acceptance of context-dependent reporting practices. Third, it identifies the journalistic roles that Indonesian journalists consider important, including monitoring, disseminative, interventionist, civic, and development-oriented roles. Fourth, it assesses the relative influence of organizational, political, economic, social, and technological institutions on journalistic work in Indonesia. These objectives are integrated into the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.

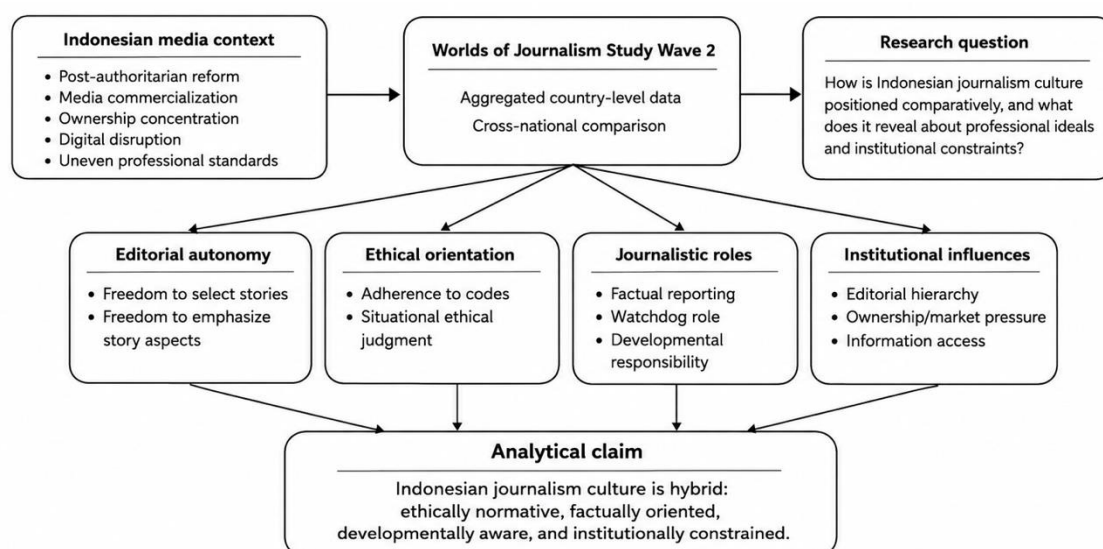


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for analyzing Indonesian journalism culture through WJS2 dimensions
(Source: Author's conceptualization based on the manuscript's introduction and WJS2 analytical framework.)

Based on Figure 1, Indonesian journalism culture is analyzed as the outcome of interactions among four dimensions rather than as the product of a single professional principle. Editorial autonomy represents the degree of freedom journalists perceive in making news decisions, while ethical orientation reflects the principles they use to justify journalistic conduct. Journalistic roles indicate the functions journalists believe they should perform in society, whereas institutional influences represent the organizational, political, economic, social, and technological forces that shape their work. The framework assumes that these dimensions may reinforce one another or create tensions. For example, journalists may strongly endorse ethical principles and watchdog roles while lacking sufficient editorial autonomy to implement those ideals consistently.

The Worlds of Journalism Study Wave 2 provides a strong empirical basis for addressing this gap. WJS2 brought together researchers from 67 countries and interviewed more than 27,500 journalists using a common methodological framework, making it one of the most extensive comparative journalism projects to date (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Worlds of Journalism Study, n.d.). Because it measures journalists' perceptions of professional roles, ethics, autonomy, influences on newsmaking, institutional trust, and changes in journalism, WJS2 makes it possible to locate Indonesia in relation to global averages and cross-national patterns.

The study is expected to show that Indonesian journalism culture cannot be adequately classified through a single normative model. Instead, Indonesia may combine strong commitments to professional ethics and socially oriented journalistic roles with comparatively limited editorial autonomy and substantial organizational, ownership-related, political, and commercial influence. Such a pattern would indicate an autonomy, ethics gap in which journalists strongly endorse professional standards but operate within institutional conditions that restrict their ability to apply those standards consistently. By identifying this relationship, the study contributes to comparative journalism research and provides a more precise understanding of journalism culture in post-authoritarian media systems. Because the dataset is aggregated at the country level, the analysis focuses on comparative national positioning and associations among national-level indicators rather than individual-level causal inference.

This study examines Indonesian journalism culture through four interrelated dimensions: editorial autonomy, ethical orientation, journalistic roles, and institutional influences. It asks: How is Indonesian journalism culture positioned in comparative perspective, and what does this position reveal about the relationship between professional ideals and institutional constraints in Indonesia?

Methodologically, the study uses secondary aggregated WJS2 data and applies descriptive statistics, cross-national comparative analysis, z-score standardization, and country ranking to identify Indonesia's relative position across key indicators. Because the dataset is aggregated at the country level, the analysis focuses on comparative national positioning rather than individual-level causal inference.

This study contributes to comparative journalism research by showing that Indonesian journalism culture is not adequately captured by a single normative model. Instead, it reveals a distinctive autonomy–ethics gap: strong professional ethical commitment coexists with comparatively limited editorial autonomy. This gap provides a more precise way to understand journalism culture in post-authoritarian media systems where professional norms may be strong, but institutional freedom remains uneven.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative secondary data analysis of the Worlds of Journalism Study Wave 2 aggregated datasets. Secondary data analysis is appropriate when existing datasets are systematically reused to address new research questions, particularly when the data are credible, well-documented, and relevant to the proposed analytical framework (Dale et al., 1988; Hakim, 2000; Johnston, 2014). The study uses WJS2 aggregated data to examine Indonesia's position within the cross-national distribution of journalism cultures across four dimensions: editorial autonomy, ethical orientation, journalistic roles, and institutional influences.

The unit of analysis is the country-level aggregate, not the individual journalist. This distinction is crucial because the available WJS2 data report national-level summaries, including respondent numbers, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Consequently, the study does not conduct individual-level causal modeling or infer relationships between individual journalists' characteristics and attitudes. Instead, it applies descriptive and comparative techniques to locate Indonesia relative to global and regional patterns. This approach is consistent with comparative social research that uses aggregate indicators to identify national positioning, cross-country variation, and broader structural patterns rather than individual-level causal mechanisms (de Vaus, 2014; Ragin, 2014).

Variables were selected from the WJS2 dataset according to the conceptual framework of the study. Editorial autonomy was measured through journalists' perceived freedom to select stories and determine which aspects of a story should be emphasized. Ethical orientation was measured through adherence to professional ethical codes and situational ethical judgment. Because the situational-ethics item has the opposite conceptual direction, it was reverse-coded so that higher scores consistently represented stronger ethical normativity. Journalistic roles included detached observation, factual reporting, analysis of current affairs, monitoring political leaders, influencing public opinion, supporting national development, attracting audiences, and supporting government policy. These indicators were analyzed separately and grouped conceptually into disseminative, interpretive, monitorial, interventionist, developmental, and market-oriented roles. Institutional influences included editorial supervisors, managers, media owners, government officials, politicians, business actors, audience feedback, competing news organizations, professional peers, journalism ethics, personal values, and access to information. These were grouped into organizational, political, market, professional, individual, and information-related influences.

Because cross-national survey indicators may vary in meaning across linguistic, political, professional, and institutional contexts, the study treats WJS2 variables as standardized comparative indicators while acknowledging their embeddedness in national media systems (Harkness et al., 2010; Jowell et al., 2007). The analysis compares Indonesia's relative position across countries rather than assuming that each item has identical cultural meaning in every national context. This follows methodological cautions in cross-national survey research, particularly when working with attitudinal and perceptual indicators (Davidov et al., 2014; Smith, 2004).

The statistical analysis proceeds in four stages. First, descriptive statistics summarize Indonesia's score on each indicator, including respondent number, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. This provides an empirical profile of Indonesian journalism culture and identifies which dimensions appear relatively strong or weak (Agresti & Finlay, 2014; Field, 2018). Second, cross-national comparative analysis compares Indonesia's mean score with the global WJS2 country-level mean for each indicator. The global mean is calculated from countries with valid data for the relevant variable; therefore, the number of countries differs across indicators because of missing values. This procedure allows Indonesia's scores to be interpreted as relative positions within a wider international distribution (Pennings et al., 2006; Pickvance, 2001).

Third, z-score standardization is applied to assess Indonesia's relative position in standard deviation units from the global mean:

$$Z = \frac{X_{Indonesia} - \bar{X}_{Global}}{SD_{Global}}$$

where $X_{Indonesia}$ represents Indonesia's mean score for a given indicator, $\bar{X}_{Global}$ represents the global country-level mean, and SD_{Global} represents the standard deviation of country-level means across countries with valid data. A positive z-score indicates that Indonesia is above the global mean, while a negative z-score indicates that it is below the global mean. Standardization is useful because it places different indicators onto a common comparative metric (Field, 2018; Howell, 2013).

The z-scores are interpreted descriptively rather than inferentially. Differences between standardized scores across dimensions are not treated as statistically significant differences unless supported by a formal statistical test. In particular, contrasts between editorial autonomy and ethical normativity are interpreted as differences in Indonesia's relative descriptive position within the cross-national distribution. A combination of relatively low editorial autonomy and relatively high ethical normativity is therefore described as a pronounced descriptive contrast between the two dimensions. For analytical convenience, this study refers to this descriptive contrast as the "autonomy-ethics gap." The term does not denote a statistically tested gap, effect size, or causal relationship.

Fourth, country ranking identifies Indonesia's ordinal position among countries with valid data for each indicator. Countries are ranked from highest to lowest based on mean scores, and Indonesia's rank is reported in relation to the number of valid country cases. Ranking is used exclusively as a descriptive comparative tool and not as evidence of causal hierarchy or statistically significant differences between countries. It complements z-score analysis because rankings provide an accessible indication of relative position, whereas z-scores provide a standardized measure of distance from the global mean (Agresti & Finlay, 2014; Treiman, 2014).

Where appropriate, standardized indicators are combined into composite dimensional scores for autonomy, ethical normativity, role orientation, and institutional influence. Composite scores are calculated by averaging z-scores within the same conceptual dimension, allowing related indicators to be summarized into broader analytical profiles while preserving standardized comparison (OECD, 2008). The autonomy dimension combines freedom in story selection and story emphasis. Ethical normativity combines adherence to professional codes and the reverse-coded situational ethics item. Role orientation includes factual, analytical, watchdog, developmental, and public-opinion roles. Institutional influence includes editorial supervisors, managers, owners, government officials, politicians, business actors, audience feedback, and competing news organizations.

The composite scores are used cautiously. They are not treated as latent variables estimated through factor analysis because the available data consist of aggregated country-level summaries rather than individual-level responses. Aggregate data cannot support the same psychometric testing as individual-level survey data (Bollen, 1989; Robinson, 1950). Therefore, the composite scores are interpreted only as descriptive profiles of Indonesia's relative position across theoretically related

dimensions. Similarly, differences between composite scores are treated as descriptive contrasts rather than statistically tested differences.

Because the analysis is based on aggregated data, the findings are interpreted as country-level comparative patterns. The study does not infer that individual Indonesian journalists with certain characteristics necessarily hold particular attitudes or role perceptions, which would risk ecological fallacy (Robinson, 1950). To avoid overstatement, z-scores between approximately -0.49 and +0.49 are treated as broadly close to the global average. Values outside this range are interpreted only as indicators of relative descriptive distance from the international mean and not, by themselves, as evidence of statistical significance.

Missing values are handled through pairwise indicator-level comparison, and the number of valid countries is reported where relevant. Overall, the analytical strategy distinguishes descriptive positioning and descriptive contrasts from statistical hypothesis testing and causal explanation, consistent with good practice in comparative quantitative analysis (King et al., 1994; Treiman, 2014).

RESULTS

Descriptive Profile of Indonesian Journalism Culture

The analysis shows that Indonesian journalism culture is characterized by a tension between strong professional normativity and limited editorial autonomy. Across the selected WJS2 indicators, Indonesian journalists strongly endorse professional ethics and factual reporting, while reporting comparatively lower levels of freedom in selecting stories and determining story emphasis. This pattern suggests a hybrid configuration in which ethical commitment, factual orientation, developmental responsibility, and institutional constraints coexist.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Indonesian Journalism Culture

Dimension	Indicator	N	% Response	High	Mean	SD
Editorial autonomy	Freedom to select stories	654	38.2		3.46	0.82
	Freedom to emphasize aspects of a story	661	44.0		3.52	0.78
Ethical orientation	Always adhere to professional codes of ethics	661	98.9		4.77	0.46
	Ethics depends on the specific situation	658	39.4		2.67	1.34
Journalistic roles	Be a detached observer	628	64.0		3.70	1.05
	Report things as they are	660	94.1		4.51	0.68
	Monitor political leaders	650	56.0		3.60	0.91
	Influence public opinion	650	49.5		3.30	1.13
	Support national development	643	75.1		3.96	0.82
Institutional influences	Personal values and beliefs	616	57.0		3.59	1.03
	Peers on the staff	609	27.1		2.93	1.04
	Editorial supervisors and higher editors	624	46.0		3.35	0.96
	Managers of the news organization	621	42.8		3.23	1.06
	Business people	633	9.0		2.18	1.02
	Information access	653	72.6		3.83	0.87

Source: Author's compilation from WJS2 aggregated datasets on editorial autonomy, ethical orientations, journalistic roles, and perceived influences. The autonomy file reports Indonesia's scores for freedom to select stories and emphasize story aspects; the ethics file reports adherence to professional codes and situational ethics; the roles file reports role perceptions including detached observer, factual reporting, political monitoring, public opinion, and national development; and the perceived influence file reports personal, organizational, business, and information-access influences.

Table 1 indicates five central patterns. First, editorial autonomy is relatively weak: only 38.2% of Indonesian journalists reported high freedom in selecting stories, and 44.0% reported high freedom

in deciding which aspects of stories should be emphasized. Second, ethical orientation is very strong, with 98.9% endorsing adherence to professional codes of ethics. Third, factual reporting is a dominant professional ideal, with 94.1% rating “report things as they are” as highly important. Fourth, support for national development is also prominent at 75.1%, suggesting that developmental responsibility remains part of Indonesian journalistic role perception. Fifth, 72.6% rated information access as highly influential, indicating that structural access to sources, documents, and institutional information is a major condition of journalistic work.

Comparative Positioning

To assess whether these patterns are distinctive, Indonesia’s mean scores were compared with the global WJS2 country-level mean. Detailed cross-national mean differences are provided in Appendix Table A1, while the main text highlights the key comparative results. Indonesia is below the global mean on both editorial autonomy indicators: freedom to select stories and freedom to emphasize aspects of a story. This confirms that Indonesian journalists report less editorial freedom than the average across WJS2 countries. By contrast, Indonesia is above the global mean in adherence to professional codes of ethics, while scoring below the global mean on situational ethics. This combination indicates that Indonesian journalists define professionalism more strongly through formal ethical standards than through contextual ethical flexibility.

The role indicators show a more mixed position. Indonesia is close to the global mean on factual reporting and monitoring political leaders, but above the global mean on support for national development. This suggests that Indonesian journalism is not unusually weak in factual or accountability-oriented roles, yet its developmental orientation is more visible than the global average. In the institutional dimension, Indonesia is close to the global mean on business influence and editorial hierarchy, but above the global mean on information access. This points to information access as a particularly salient structural condition in Indonesian journalism.

Z-Score and Ranking

Table 2 reports Indonesia’s standardized position using z-scores and country ranking. Z-scores indicate Indonesia’s distance from the global mean in standard deviation units, while rankings show Indonesia’s ordinal position among countries with valid WJS2 data. Detailed country rankings are provided in Appendix Table A2.

Table 2. Z-Score and Ranking of Indonesia across Selected WJS2 Indicators

Dimension	Indicator	Indonesia Mean	Z-Score	Rank	Interpretation
Editorial autonomy	Freedom to select stories	3.46	-0.92	58/67	Lower range
	Freedom to emphasize aspects of a story	3.52	-0.88	56/67	Lower range
Ethical orientation	Always adhere to professional codes of ethics	4.77	+0.94	5/67	Upper range
	Ethics depends on the specific situation	2.67	-1.08	56/67	Lower range
Journalistic roles	Be a detached observer	3.70	-0.63	49/67	Lower-middle range
	Report things as they are	4.51	+0.04	43/67	Middle range
	Monitor political leaders	3.60	-0.22	40/67	Middle range
	Influence public opinion	3.30	-0.09	38/67	Middle range
	Support national development	3.96	+0.65	24/67	Upper-middle range
Institutional influences	Editorial supervisors and higher editors	3.35	-0.41	46/67	Middle-lower range

Managers of the news organization	3.23	+0.31	30/67	Middle range
Business people	2.18	-0.06	32/66	Middle range
Information access	3.83	+0.52	20/67	Upper-middle range

Source: Author's z-score and ranking calculation using WJS2 aggregated country-level means. Rankings include only countries with valid data for each indicator; therefore, the denominator differs across variables.

The z-score and ranking results sharpen the comparative picture. Indonesia is positioned in the lower range for editorial autonomy, ranking 58th of 67 countries for freedom to select stories and 56th of 67 for freedom to emphasize story aspects. In contrast, Indonesia ranks 5th of 67 countries for adherence to professional codes of ethics, with a positive z-score of +0.94. These results indicate a marked descriptive contrast between Indonesia's relatively low position on editorial autonomy and its relatively high position on adherence to professional ethical codes. This contrast is interpreted descriptively and should not be understood as evidence of a statistically significant difference between the two dimensions.

The role indicators further support a hybrid interpretation. Factual reporting is close to the global average, while support for national development is moderately above the global average and located in the upper-middle range. Meanwhile, information access ranks 20th of 67, indicating that access to information is a comparatively important institutional condition for Indonesian journalists.

Composite Profile

To summarize the broader pattern, Table 3 presents the composite profile of Indonesian journalism culture. These composite scores are descriptive summaries of theoretically related indicators and are not intended to validate latent constructs.

Table 3. Composite Profile of Indonesian Journalism Culture

Composite Dimension	Indicators Included	Composite Z-Score	Interpretation
Editorial Autonomy	Freedom to select stories; freedom to emphasize aspects	-0.90	Below global average
Ethical Normativity	Adherence to codes; reverse-coded situational ethics	+1.01	Strongly above global average
Factual-Watchdog Orientation	Role Detached observer; report things as they are; monitor political leaders	-0.27	Slightly below global average
Developmental-Interventionist Orientation	Role Support national development; influence public opinion	+0.28	Slightly above global average
Institutional Influence	Editorial supervisors; managers; business people; information access	+0.09	Near global average

Source: Author's composite calculation based on standardized WJS2 country-level indicators. Composite scores are descriptive summaries derived from WJS2 autonomy, ethical orientation, journalistic role, and perceived influence datasets.

The composite profile further illustrates this descriptive pattern. Indonesia's lowest composite score is editorial autonomy (-0.90), while its highest is ethical normativity (+1.01). Taken together, these scores reveal a pronounced descriptive contrast between ethical normativity and editorial autonomy. In this study, we refer to this contrast as the "autonomy-ethics gap." The term is used as descriptive analytical shorthand and does not imply that a statistical test of the difference between the two composite dimensions has been conducted. This pattern suggests that Indonesian journalism combines a strong professional-ethical orientation with comparatively limited editorial independence.

The role profile also shows that Indonesia does not fully conform to a detached liberal-watchdog model; instead, it combines factual and accountability roles with developmental responsibility. Institutional influence is near the global average overall, but information access remains a distinctive constraint. Overall, these results provide the empirical basis for interpreting Indonesian journalism culture as ethically normative, factually oriented, developmentally aware, and institutionally constrained.

DISCUSSION

The Autonomy–Ethics Gap in Indonesian Journalism Culture

The most important finding of this study is a pronounced descriptive contrast between ethical normativity and editorial autonomy. Indonesian journalists show high endorsement of professional codes of ethics, while reporting comparatively lower levels of freedom in selecting stories and deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized. As introduced in the Results section, we refer to this descriptive contrast as the “autonomy–ethics gap.” This label describes the relative positioning of the two dimensions in the cross-national WJS2 data and is not intended to denote a statistically tested difference. The pattern suggests that professional values and editorial independence do not necessarily develop at the same pace. In the Indonesian case, journalists appear to have strongly internalized formal ethical standards and factual reporting norms, but their ability to translate these ideals into autonomous editorial decision-making remains shaped by newsroom hierarchy, organizational routines, ownership structures, information access, and broader institutional pressures.

This finding challenges the assumption that journalistic professionalization automatically produces editorial independence. If professionalism is measured only through commitment to ethical codes, Indonesian journalism appears highly professional. However, if it is assessed through editorial autonomy, the picture is more constrained. The issue, therefore, is not the absence of professional values, but the uneven institutional conditions that allow those values to be enacted. Ethical professionalism and editorial independence should be treated as related but analytically distinct dimensions of journalism culture.

The Indonesian case strengthens the argument that journalism culture should be understood as a multidimensional configuration rather than a single normative type. Hanitzsch’s framework emphasizes that journalism culture consists of professional roles, epistemological orientations, and ethical ideologies that vary across national contexts rather than conforming to one universal model (Hanitzsch, 2007, 2011). The hierarchy-of-influences perspective also helps explain why professional ideals may be filtered through organizational, ownership, political, and market structures before becoming actual editorial practice (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, 2014). In this sense, Indonesia illustrates a form of constrained professionalism: journalists affirm strong professional norms, but those norms operate within structural limits.

This descriptive autonomy–ethics contrast is particularly relevant for understanding journalism in Global South and post-authoritarian media systems. Democratization, media liberalization, and professional training may strengthen journalistic norms without fully removing constraints on news production. Indonesia illustrates this condition clearly. After the end of the New Order regime, the press gained greater formal freedom, yet journalism continued to operate within a media environment shaped by ownership concentration, political-economic pressures, digital disruption, and uneven institutional access (Berkowitz et al., 2004; Tapsell, 2015, 2017). The central tension is therefore not between professionalism and non-professionalism, but between normative professional commitment and constrained editorial agency.

Factual Reporting, Watchdog Orientation, and Developmental Responsibility

The role-orientation findings further show that Indonesian journalism cannot be reduced to a single professional model. Indonesian journalists strongly value factual reporting, indicating that accuracy and reality-based information remain central professional ideals. However, the role profile is

not dominated by the detached observer or liberal-watchdog model. Monitoring political leaders remains important, but it does not appear as the most defining orientation (Aurelly & Ramadhana, 2025). This suggests that watchdog journalism is present within Indonesian professional culture, but it does not fully define the occupational identity of Indonesian journalists.

At the same time, support for national development is relatively strong. This finding is important because it shows that Indonesian journalism retains a developmental orientation alongside factual and accountability-oriented roles. However, this should not be interpreted simply as support for government policy. The data suggest a distinction between supporting national development as a public responsibility and supporting government policy as a political position. Indonesian journalists may understand journalism as contributing to social progress, public welfare, and national development without positioning themselves as extensions of the state.

This distinction is important for post-authoritarian contexts. Developmental responsibility in Indonesia does not automatically mean state-aligned journalism. Rather, it reflects a professional role logic shaped by historical and institutional conditions. Indonesian journalism combines factual reporting, moderate watchdog orientation, and developmental responsibility. This combination challenges narrow liberal-democratic assumptions that equate professional maturity only with adversarial monitoring of power. Instead, it suggests that journalism culture in non-Western contexts often operates through overlapping role expectations.

Institutional Constraint and Information Access

The findings also show that Indonesian journalism is shaped by institutional constraints. Editorial hierarchy, managerial influence, audience feedback, competition, and information access all appear relevant to journalistic work. These factors indicate that journalists do not operate only as independent professional actors; their work is embedded within organizational structures and broader systems of power that shape what can be reported, how it can be reported, and which information can be accessed.

Information access is especially significant. Indonesia's score on information access is above the global mean and ranks in the upper-middle range, indicating that the ability to obtain information is a major condition of journalistic work. Even when journalists value ethics and factual reporting, they cannot fully enact these ideals without reliable sources, documents, institutional transparency, and access to public data. Information access is therefore not merely a technical issue; it is part of the institutional architecture that enables or limits journalism.

This finding provides a possible contextual explanation for the observed descriptive contrast between strong ethical normativity and comparatively limited editorial autonomy, although the aggregated data do not permit a causal test of this relationship. Professional norms require enabling conditions. Without adequate information access and institutional openness, journalists may remain committed to ethics and factuality while still facing practical barriers to independent reporting. Direct business influence appears less dominant than some other institutional variables, but this should not be read as the absence of political-economic pressure. Influence may operate indirectly through ownership structures, editorial policies, advertising dependence, newsroom hierarchy, political networks, and source access. This is especially relevant in Indonesia, where studies of media ownership and oligarchic influence have shown that formal press freedom can coexist with concentrated media power and indirect editorial constraint (Lim, 2012; Tapsell, 2015, 2017).

Thus, Indonesian journalism culture is shaped not only by what journalists believe, but also by the conditions under which they work. Professional ideals are mediated by institutional structures. Any analysis of Indonesian journalism must therefore examine both normative self-understanding and the practical constraints that shape journalistic agency.

Implications for Comparative Journalism Studies

Taken together, the findings suggest that Indonesian journalism culture is best understood as a configuration of professional ideals and institutional constraints. The evidence shows the coexistence of strong ethical normativity, factual reporting, moderate watchdog orientation, developmental responsibility, limited editorial autonomy, and significant concern with information access. This configuration cannot be adequately explained through a single model such as liberal-watchdog journalism, developmental journalism, or institutionally dependent journalism. The Indonesian case combines elements of these models, making it more appropriate to conceptualize it as a hybrid professional culture shaped by post-authoritarian conditions.

The study contributes to comparative journalism research by using the term “autonomy-ethics gap” as a descriptive analytical lens for examining the coexistence of comparatively strong ethical normativity and comparatively limited editorial autonomy. Rather than representing a statistically established gap, the concept summarizes a pronounced descriptive contrast observed in Indonesia’s relative cross-national positioning. This analytical distinction helps avoid two common simplifications: assuming that weak autonomy necessarily means weak professionalism, or assuming that strong ethical commitment necessarily entails full editorial independence. The WJS2 aggregated data do not allow individual-level causal inference or a direct statistical test of the relationship between these composite dimensions, but they provide a comparative map of Indonesia’s national position across key dimensions of journalism culture. Overall, the central tension in Indonesian journalism is not simply between democracy and authoritarian legacy, or between professionalism and political economy. It is more precisely a tension between normative professional commitment and constrained editorial agency. This tension is central to understanding Indonesian journalism culture and offers a broader conceptual contribution to the study of journalism in non-Western media systems.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, it relies on aggregated country-level WJS2 data, which means that the findings cannot be interpreted as individual-level causal relationships. The analysis identifies Indonesia’s comparative position across selected journalism culture indicators, but it cannot explain how individual journalists’ backgrounds, newsroom positions, or organizational contexts shape their attitudes and practices.

Second, the composite scores used in this study are descriptive summaries, not validated latent constructs. They are useful for mapping Indonesia’s relative position across theoretically related dimensions, but they should not be interpreted as psychometric scales. Accordingly, the observed contrast between the autonomy and ethical-normativity composite scores should not be interpreted as a statistically tested difference. Future research using individual-level WJS data could test whether these dimensions form statistically robust constructs through factor analysis or multilevel modeling and could directly examine whether the observed autonomy-ethics contrast represents a statistically meaningful relationship or difference at the individual and country levels.

Third, WJS2 captures journalism culture within a specific historical period. Since Indonesian journalism has continued to change through digital platformization, political polarization, media ownership shifts, and changing audience behavior, future studies should combine WJS data with newsroom interviews, survey updates, and news content analysis. Such research could assess whether the descriptive contrast between ethical normativity and editorial autonomy observed in WJS2 persists in contemporary Indonesian journalism and could test the mechanisms that may account for it.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how Indonesian journalism culture is positioned in comparative perspective and what this position reveals about the relationship between professional ideals and institutional constraints. The findings show that Indonesian journalism is best understood as a hybrid professional culture. Indonesian journalists strongly endorse professional ethics and factual reporting,

but report comparatively limited editorial autonomy. This demonstrates a clear autonomy–ethics gap: strong normative professionalism does not automatically produce strong editorial independence.

Theoretically, this study contributes to comparative journalism research by showing that Indonesian journalism cannot be adequately explained through a single model such as liberal-watchdog journalism, developmental journalism, or institutionally constrained journalism. Instead, Indonesian journalism combines factual reporting, moderate watchdog orientation, developmental responsibility, and limited editorial agency. The relatively strong support for national development should not be read simply as support for government policy, but as part of a broader public-responsibility orientation shaped by Indonesia's post-authoritarian media context.

The findings also show that institutional conditions remain central to Indonesian journalism culture. Editorial hierarchy, managerial influence, audience feedback, competition, and especially access to information shape the extent to which professional ideals can be translated into editorial practice. In this sense, Indonesian journalism culture is ethically normative, factually oriented, developmentally aware, and institutionally constrained.

This study is limited by its use of aggregated country-level WJS2 data, which prevents individual-level causal inference. The results should therefore be interpreted as a comparative national profile rather than evidence of individual journalist behavior. Future research should extend this analysis using individual-level WJS data, newsroom interviews, or news content analysis to examine how these professional orientations are enacted in everyday journalistic practice.

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