An Investigation of Journalists' Job Satisfaction in Bishkek, Capital of the Kyrgyz Republic

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Abstract

The results of a survey of journalists in the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan (N=211) demonstrate that they primarily see their societal role as being to mobilize people with common interests and provide objective analysis. The media's traditional role as a watchdog, meanwhile, was rated least important by journalists in the country, which is widely considered the "most democratic" in Central Asia. The study also found that the majority described themselves as being "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" professionally, a feeling directly impacted by their income, sense of autonomy, and supervisor's perceived ability. Low salary, disagreement with editorial policy, and excessive pressure were found to be the leading reasons that Kyrgyz journalists left the profession. This research extends previous knowledge of journalists' job satisfaction by examining the often-overlooked region of Central Asia. The surveys were conducted between April 29 and May 19, 2016, primarily in the Russian and Kyrgyz languages.

Keywords

journalists – democracy – quantitative survey – Kyrgyzstan – former Soviet Union

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Introduction

Journalism affects everyone and is considered among the most "socially and politically significant professions."[1] Journalists play a pivotal role in providing information for political and other critical decisions by members of a society.[2] It is therefore important to conduct scholarly analysis of journalists' job satisfaction, as it affects their productivity at work and their commitment to serving the public interest.[3] Globally, there is already a substantial body of research on journalists' job satisfaction and how they view their roles in society. Such studies have been undertaken in the United States,[4] Europe,[5] Australia,[6] Latin America,[7] the Middle East,[8] Africa, and parts of Asia. Central Asia, however, is not part of this literary landscape, and research shows that the region is often overlooked in international peer-reviewed publications.[9]

Recent attacks on Kyrgyzstan's journalists only heighten the need to research journalists' job satisfaction and the social role of journalism in this area of the world. The struggles facing Kyrgyzstan's journalists include lawsuits, physical attacks, detention, imprisonment, and information restrictions. In 2016, the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) reported that Kyrgyz journalists express fear about reporting on high-ranking politicians. Limited access

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1 A.W. Dzur, *Democratic Professionalism: Citizen Participation and the Reconstruction of Professional Ethics, Identity and Practice* (University Park, pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

2 D. Wu and C.A. Lamber, "Impediments to Journalistic Ethics: How Taiwan's Media Market Obstructs News Professional Practice," *Journal of Media Ethics*, 31 (2016): 35–50.

3 H. Xiaming, C. George, and S. Cong, "Job Satisfaction of Journalists: Professional Aspirations, Newsroom Culture and Social Context," *Media Asia*, 40, no. 1 (2013): 73–84.

4 R. Beam, D. Weaver, and B. Brownlee, "Changes in Professionalism of U.S. Journalists in the Turbulent Twenty-First Century," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 86 (2009): 277–298.

5 M.B. van Rinscha, "The Impact of Working Conditions and Personality Traits on the Job Satisfaction of Media Professionals," *Media Industries*, 2, no. 2 (2015).

6 B. Josephi and I. Richards, "The Australian Journalist in the 21st Century," in D.H. Weaver and L. Willnat (eds.), *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 115–125.

7 H. Herscovitz, "The Brazilian Journalist in the 21st Century," in D.H. Weaver and L. Willnat (eds.), *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 365–381.

8 M. Kirat, "Journalists in the United Arab Emirates," in D.H. Weaver and L. Willnat (eds.), *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 458–470.

9 E. Freedman, "Deepening Shadows: The Eclipse of Press Rights in Kyrgyzstan," *Global Media and Communication*, 8, no. 1 (2012): 47–64.

and fear of repercussions may be two of the reasons that this part of the world remains under-analyzed in the scholarly literature.10

Kyrgyzstan and the other Central Asian countries spent seven decades under Soviet control, which "discouraged and even impeded"11 research. Since the ussr's collapse in 1991, some research on media in the region has emerged. However, Freedman and Shafer note that people in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia more broadly might not be willing to participate in research because they are not familiar with the concept.12 Even those willing to participate might self- censor their responses due to fear of governmental retaliation.13 The quality of the academic literature is further limited by the fact that most of the existing knowledge comes from reporters and editors; to date, very little quantitative research on the media and journalists in Central Asia exists.14 The goal of this study is to contribute to the body of knowledge on journalism in the remote Kyrgyz Republic by examining several research questions that originate from the recent global literature. To answer these questions, the study surveyed professional journalists working in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Background on Kyrgyzstan

It is difficult to accurately estimate the number of active media outlets in the country because some news outlets may cease to operate for economic and political reasons and/or remain inactive but still be registered officially. According to the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) (2018), there are more than 1,500 registered media outlets in the country, including 159 active print media outlets, 26 radio stations, 25 terrestrial tv stations, and three local cable networks. Although Kyrgyzstan ranks better on freedom of the press than neighboring countries such as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, there are occasional attacks on press freedom in the country, both on individual journalists and whole media outlets.

10 E. Freedman and R. Shafer, *After the Czars and Commissars: Journalism in Authoritarian Post-Soviet Central Asia* (East Lansing, mi: Michigan State University Press, 2012).

11 Ibid, 120.

12 Ibid.

13 G. Pitts, "Professionalism Among Journalists in Kyrgyzstan," in E. Freedman and R. Sha- fer (eds.), *After the Czars and Commissars: Journalism in Authoritarian Post-Soviet Central Asia* (East Lansing, mi: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 233–243.

14 D. Shamatov, E. Schatz, and S. Niyozov, "Peer Review Publications for Improving Scholarship in Central Asia," *auca Academic Review*, 11, no. 1 (2010): 172–179.

According to Reporters Without Borders' 2018 annual report on freedom of the press, Kyrgyzstan is ranked 98th out of 180 countries, while neighboring Kazakhstan is ranked 158th and Tajikistan 149th. Freedom House's 2018 report grouped Kyrgyzstan among the "partly free" countries, while Tajikistan and Kazakhstan are listed among the "not free" countries. Despite Kyrgyzstan's higher ranking, attacks on independent journalists and news outlets continue to occur. For example, the Kyrgyz government regularly blocks a popular Russian-language news website, Ferghana News Agency, for various reasons. The Kyrgyz government first blocked the website in 2010, then in 2012, and most recently in 2017, citing "subjective reporting." Other independent news outlets have faced threats, lawsuits, and other serious consequences. Former Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambaev said in 2017, during his presidency, that he was prepared to take the U.S. Congress-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) to international courts for its libelous reporting. Atambaev further said that he would complain to U.S. President Donald Trump during his visit to Washington. The Kyrgyzstan prosecutor's office filed a lawsuit against RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service and a popular local media outlet, Zanoza.kg, seeking damages of about us$144,000 from the former and about us$43,000 from the latter. However, these lawsuits were dropped. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), Kyrgyz courts in 2017 ordered media outlets, journalists, and human rights defenders to pay a total of us$430,000 to Kyrgyzstan's now- former president for defamation.15 Furthermore, independent journalists and bloggers have faced harassment or threats, with some even being forced to flee the country for speaking out.16 IREX reports that restricting press freedom is high on the political agenda.

It is important to understand the wider context of Kyrgyzstan, especially the political and socio-economic landscape in which Kyrgyz journalists work. Overall, Kyrgyzstan's political situation has suffered from constant instability since its independence, facing coups in 2005 and 2010. In both coups, the presidents had to flee the country. These coups set the country back economically by about 10 years.17 Harassment of both local and international nongovernmental

15 Human Rights Watch, "The World Report 2018: Kyrgyzstan," 2018, https://www.hrw.org/ world-report/2018/country-chapters/Kyrgyzstan (accessed November 30, 2018).

16 IREX, "Media Sustainability Index (MSI): Europe and Eurasia," 2017, https://www.IREX.org/ sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2017-kyrgyzstan.pdf (accessed November 30, 2018).

17 C. Kambarov, "Organized Criminal Groups in Kyrgyzstan and the Role of Law Enforcement," *Voices from Central Asia*, 20 (2015): 1–9.

organizations, restrictions on religious freedom, and pervasive corruption are some of the most important human rights problems.18 According to Freedom House's 2016 report, the judicial system continues to serve the interests of political elites and selectively prosecute government critics or outspoken community leaders. The U.S. Department of State also notes that judges are subject to influence or corruption, saying "bribe taking was ubiquitous" in 2016.19 Inter-ethnic tensions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz still exist, fueled by the deadly 2010 clashes that displaced almost half a million people. Since then, six prime ministers have resigned. People have a low level of trust in the government,20 with the result that regular protests in the capital and other cities are not uncommon. Increasingly, Kyrgyz citizens demand action from their government on a variety of democratic issues.

In their work, Richard Shafer and Eric Freedman have suggested that Kyrgyzstan is "best positioned to travel the road to liberalization" of all the countries in Central Asia.21 The region is widely regarded as "hostile to civil society such as multiple parties, political rights, rights to free speech and religious practice, aggressive opposition to corruption freedom of associations, government transparency, and finally a free and fair election process."22 As such, Kyrgyzstan is consistently ranked better than its neighbors but remains among the "partly free" or "not free" countries with regard to freedom of the press and freedom of speech. Kyrgyz journalists are harassed, threatened, violently attacked, prosecuted, and imprisoned.23 The Kyrgyz government can cancel newspaper runs and mute criticism on television and radio programs.24 In this context, journalists tend to avoid any stories that may bring personal trouble.25 The following are several infamous examples of when independent journalists got into trouble for simply doing their jobs.

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18 U.S. Department of State, "2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Kyrgyzstan," 2016, https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2016/sca/265540.htm (accessed November 30, 2018).

19 Ibid.

20 Kambarov, "Organized Criminal Groups."

21 Freedman and Shafer, *After the Czars and Commissars*, 57.

22 Ibid.

23 Freedman, "Deepening Shadows."

24 E. McGlinchey and E. Johnson, "Aiding the Internet in Central Asia," *Democratization*, 14, no. 1 (2007): 273–288.

25 T. Kenny and P. Gross, "Journalism in Central Asia: A Victim of Politics, Economics, and Widespread Self-Censorship," *The International Journal of Press/Politics,* 13, no. 4 (2008): 515–525.

In 2006, the head of Kyrgyzstan's *Pyramid tv* station, Yelena Cherniavskaya, received an anonymous phone call threatening her with death unless she changed her editorial line.26 The following March, reporter Talantbek Sopuev was beaten by about 40 men and women. Later that year, he was once again badly beaten by strangers.27 Attackers of Kyrgyz investigative reporter Kubanychbek Zholdoshev sent him a message via the internet stating: "Next time, we won't forgive you. Think of yourself. Be thankful that we let you live."28 On December 15, 2009, a bullet from an automatic rifle and threatening notes were delivered via mail to the *Shamy* newspaper in Osh.29 A reporter can be dismissed from his/her job for asking officials an "inappropriate" question,30 as with the 2016 dismissal of well-known tv journalist Ernis Kiyazov from *NTS TV*, which is based in Bishkek, for a Facebook question addressed to the President of Kyrgyzstan. Some high-profile journalists—such as Alisher Saipov, Yuri Alexandrov, Seitbek Murataliev, and Gennady Pavlyuk—have been murdered. Other journalists have faced lawsuits or found themselves compelled to seek asylum in foreign countries.

Thanks to Kyrgyzstan's reputation as the freest country in Central Asia, its capital, Bishkek, has become a hub for foreign journalists and international media. However, foreign journalists face the same struggles and challenges as local reporters do. This is evident from the attacks on French reporter Matilda Goanje and *Sunday Times* correspondent Toni Hellin; the deportation of American journalist Umar Farooq in 2015; and the life sentence handed down to well-known independent journalist and human rights activist Azimjon

26 Reporters without Borders, "Death Threats Made Against Editor of Independent tv," April 28, 2006, last updated January 20, 2016, https://rsf.org/en/news/death-threats- made-against-editor-independent-tv (accessed November 30, 2018).

27 Reporters without Borders, "Letter to Kyrgyz Authorities about Wave of Violence against Journalists," April 6, 2007, last updated January 20, 2016, https://rsf.org/en/news/ letter-kyrgyz-authorities-about-wave-violence-against-journalists (accessed November 30, 2018).

28 Reporters without Borders, "Government Urged to React to Increasingly Frequent Attacks on Journalists," December 10, 2009, last updated January 20, 2016, https://rsf.org/en/news/ government-urged-react-increasingly-frequent-attacks-journalists (accessed November 30, 2018).

29 Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), "OSCE Media Freedom Representative Calls on Kyrgyzstan to Address 'Safety Crisis' of Free Press," December 23, 2009, http://www.osce.org/fom/51795 (accessed November 30, 2018).

30 Televedushego Ernisa Kiyazova uvolili s telekanala NTS (NTS fires TV host). Knews. kg, March 15, https://knews.kg/2016/03/15/televedushhego-ernisa-kyyazova-uvolili-s -telekanala-nts/.

Askarov for his investigations into government corruption and human rights abuses by law enforcement officers.

Freedman notes that there are many reasons for this repressive environment, including the authoritarian nature of the region's regimes and a lack of traditional independent media, to name just a few.31

Economic Context of Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is one of the poorest countries in Eurasia, largely because it lacks oil, gas, or major natural resources to support its economy. It therefore relies heavily on various international grants and loans. In April 2016, members of Parliament32 drafted a law seeking urgent international humanitarian aid. Transparency International's 2017 report33 listed Kyrgyzstan as one of the countries with an "extreme level of corruption," ranking it 135th out of 180 countries. According to the organization's report, the reasons for this classification included weak rule of law and conflicts of interests that sometimes enabled perpetrators to escape with the minimum penalty or get off completely. Poverty, unemployment, and low wages are just a few of the many compelling reasons why almost 20% of Kyrgyzstan's almost six million people are migrant workers in foreign countries; according to Asia Development Bank, nearly 2 million people in the country live below the national poverty line.34

In this environment, many news outlets are struggling to survive. According to the local news agency *Knews.kg*, the average salary in Kyrgyzstan is 16,600 Kyrgyz soms,35 or roughly us$245, per month. Thus, although it is difficult to accurately estimate journalists' salaries, in part because most news outlets hire journalists "off the book" to avoid paying state taxes and contributions to the pension fund, we can be fairly certain that as a whole, they earn a "starvation

31 Freedman, "Deepening Shadows."

32 A. Bengard, "Deputaty schitaiut, chto Kyrgyzstan ostro nuzhdaetsia v poluchenii gumanitarnoi pomoshchi," *24.kg*, April 5, 2016, http://24.kg/vlast/30204_deputatyi_schitayut_chto_kyirgyizstan_ostro_nujdaetsya_v_poluchenii_gumanitarnoy_pomoschi/.

33 Transparency International, "Corruption Perception Index for 2017: Kyrgyzstan," https://en.transparency.kg/news/2/35.html (accessed November 30, 2018).

34 Asia Development Bank, "Poverty in the Kyrgyz Republic," https://www.adb.org/countries/kyrgyz-republic/poverty (accessed November 30, 2018).

35 "V 2018 godu sredniaia zarplata v Kyrgyzstane dostignet 16,6 tys. somov—prognoz Minfina," *Knews.kg*, November 16, 2017, http://knews.kg/2017/11/v-2018-godu-srednyaya-zar- plata-v-kyrgyzstane-dostignet-16–6-tys-somov-prognoz-minfina/.

wage."[36] Indeed, according to the 2016 IREX report, most reporters have to work for several media outlets or find unrelated work in order to earn a decent salary.[37] Moreover, some news outlets outside the capital even "encounter shortages of desktop computers …and internet access,"[38] further limiting their efficacy.

Literature Review

It is thought that Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman[39] were the first to examine journalists' professional satisfaction, interviewing more than 1,300 journalists in the United States. Since then, a great deal of research about job satisfaction in the profession has been undertaken globally.[40] To really compare the data, however, some scholars argue that a commonly accepted definition of job satisfaction is required.[41] At present, some define it as a positive orientation toward the work,[42] while others (such as Smucker, Whisenant, and Pedersen[43]) define it as an individual's feelings toward the position they hold. It is also measured in a variety of ways. Bramlett-Solomon[44] examined job satisfaction by applying a single indicator, simply asking, "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your present job?"[45] Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman[46]

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36 D. Mould and E. Schuster, "Central Asia: Ethics—a Western Luxury," in *Ethics in Journalism: A Reader on Their Perception in the Third World* (Bonn: Fridrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2009).

37 IREX, "Media Sustainability Index (msi): Europe and Eurasia," 2016, https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2016-kyrgyzstan.pdf. pdf (accessed November 30, 2018).

38 Ibid.

39 J. Johnstone, E. Slawski, and W. Bowman, "Job Satisfaction Research: A Management Guide for Practitioners," *Personnel Journal*, 43, no. 3 (1976): 172–177.

40 K. Ireri, "High Job Satisfaction Despite Low Income: A National Study of Kenyan Journalists," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 93, no. 1 (2016): 164–186.

41 R. Beam, "Organizational Goals and Priorities and the Job Satisfaction of U.S. Journalists," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 83 (2006): 169–185.

42 C. Muller and J. McCloskey, "Nurses' Job Satisfaction: A Proposed Measure," *Nursing Research*, 39 (1990): 113–117.

43 M. Smucker, W. Wisenant, and P. Pedersen, "An Investigation of Job Satisfaction and Female Sports Journalists," *Sex Roles*, 49 (2003): 401–407.

44 S. Bramlett-Solomon, "Predictors of Job Satisfaction among Black Journalists," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 69, no. 3 (1992): 703–712.

45 Ireri, "High Job Satisfaction Despite Low Income," 169.

46 F. Herzberg, B. Mausner, and B. Snyderman, *The Motivation to Work* (New York: John Wiley& Sons, 1959).

determined that job satisfaction consisted of two independent sets of factors. The first is intrinsic factors or motivations that stem from the job's content: autonomy, competence, responsibility, achievement, and/or challenge. The second is extrinsic factors that arise from the job's context: income, fringe benefits, safety, and company policies.47 This two-factor model of job satisfaction has been widely applied to measure journalists' job satisfaction.

The existing literature suggests that multiple variables play a role in predicting journalists' job satisfaction in different studies. These variables include income,48 autonomy,49 job security,50 organizational support,51 contract type,52 job prestige,53 and how superiors evaluate them.54 Lo reported that job satisfaction was correlated with education in Taiwan,55 while Hao and George56 concluded that age played a role in job satisfaction among journalists in Singapore. Lucht's qualitative study revealed gender differences in individuals' descriptions of their attitudes toward the profession.57

The focus of this study is to assess what professional journalists in Kyrgyz-stan perceive their role in society to be, along with gauging job satisfaction. This research is particularly salient given that the country is considered to be "among the most oppressive of all media environments."58 Therefore, journalists tend to focus on stories that have little or no potential to incur personal trouble.59

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47 R. Rothman, *Working: Sociological Perspectives* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1987)

48 T. Hanitzsch and D. Hidayat, "Journalists in Indonesia," in D. Weaver and L. Wilnat (eds.), *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

49 Bramlett-Solomon, "Predictors of Job Satisfaction."

50 S. Reinardy, "Beyond Satisfaction: Journalists Doubt Career Intentions as Organizational Support Diminishes and Job Satisfaction Declines," *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 17, no. 3 (2009): 126–139.

51 Ibid.

52 A. Deprez and K. Raeymaeckers, "A Longitudinal Study of Job Satisfaction among Flemish Professional Journalists," *Journalism and Mass Communication*, 2, no. 1 (2012): 1–15.

53 Bramlett-Solomon, "Predictors of Job Satisfaction."

54 C. St. Cyr, "Study of City Editors Raises Concern for Job Satisfaction," *Newspaper Research Journal*, 29, no. 1 (2008): 21–35.

55 L. Ven-Hwei, "Journalists in Taiwan," in D. Weaver and L. Wilnat (eds.), *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

56 X. Ho and C. George, "Singapore Journalism: Buying into a Winning Formula," in D. Weaver and L. Wilnat (eds.), *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

57 T. Lucht, "Job Satisfaction and Gender," *Journalism Practice*, 10, no. 3 (2016): 405–423.

58 McGlinchey and Johnson, "Aiding the Internet."

59 Kenny and Gross, "Journalism in Central Asia."

Research has found that income is one of the main predictors of job satisfaction among journalists around the world.60 Those who earn more money are likely to be more satisfied with their jobs than those who earn less. Job autonomy also predicted professional satisfaction in many studies. For example, roughly 60% of journalists surveyed by Kirat in the United Arab Emirates said that job autonomy determined their job satisfaction.61 In a large study of Taiwanese journalists, Ven-Hwei reported that those who claimed more autonomy expressed greater job satisfaction.62

Research regarding the relationship between journalists' view of their editorial superiors and overall job satisfaction is limited or non-existent. St. Cyr examined job satisfaction among editors in relation to their reporters' performance, as well as how satisfied news outlet editors were with management. The study found that editors' job dissatisfaction stemmed from reporters, while satisfaction originated from management.63 To contribute to research on this understudied topic, this study proposes the following broad research question:

RQ1: How satisfied are Kyrgyz journalists with their profession?

During the Soviet era, the media served as a propaganda tool through which the Soviet leadership could promote its own ideology. As a result, domestic media were fully subordinated to the Communist Party.64 Critical foreign media, meanwhile, was limited by jamming radio signals, among other tactics.65 Freedman66 points out that Soviet leaders knew that "press freedom and public access to information could threaten" the Soviet regime and therefore need- ed controlling.

Although Kyrgyzstan gained its independence in 1991, the Kyrgyz government continues to control and censor the mass media. University-level journalism education, too, is still very much in the Soviet mold: local journalists practice interpretive and persuasive reporting.67 In this context, it is logical to examine the following questions:

60 P. Mwesige, "Disseminators, Advocates, and Watchdogs: A Profile of Ugandan Journalistsin the New Millennium," *Journalism*, 5 (2004): 69–96.

61 Kirat, "Journalists in the United Arab Emirates."

62 Ven-Hwei, "Journalists in Taiwan."

63 St. Cyr, "Study of City Editors."

64 Freedman and Shafer, *After the Czars and Commissars*.

65 S. Oates, "Post-Soviet Political Communication," in H. Semetko and M. Scammel (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Political Communication* (Los Angeles: sage, 2012), 461–472.

66 Freedman and Shafer, *After the Czars and Commissars*, 1.

67 Freedman, "Deepening Shadows."

RQ2: What roles do Kyrgyz journalists believe the news media shouldplay?
RQ3: How committed are they to journalism as a profession?

Methodology

A 38-question survey was conducted between April 29 and May 19, 2016. The paper-based survey, provided in journalists' choice of Russian or Kyrgyz language, was distributed during gatherings of journalists, such as news conferences, journalism trainings, and/or media tours of the capital city, Bishkek. Although the research was conducted in Bishkek, journalists working for and representing media outlets outside the capital were able to participate, since journalism trainings organized by local and international organizations such as Internews Network, Open Society Foundation, and the United Nations office in Bishkek generally include journalists from the regions.

Survey participants worked for local news outlets as well as for foreign news outlets such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Kyrgyz Service (locally known as Azattyk), the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), the Associated Press (AP), Agence France Press (AFP), and Sputnik News. These foreign news outlets offer much higher salaries than local outlets.

Many reporters who were approached declined the opportunity to participate in the survey, for various reasons.

The questionnaire was adapted from previous research studies that have been conducted in approximately 30 countries worldwide, including those in Asia, Europe, South America, North America, the Middle East, and Africa.68

To help assess journalists' perception of their role in society, participants were given 15 statements of various roles that they might play in society and asked to select their level of disagreement or agreement with whether they should play that role. Responses were measured on a five-point scale in which 5 corresponds to "strongly agree" and 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree." The statements were: (1) motivate people to get involved in public discussion of important issues; (2) get information to the public quickly; (3) concentrate on news that is of interest to the widest possible audience; (4) discuss national policy while it is being developed; (5) give ordinary people a chance to express their views on public affairs; (6) point people toward possible solutions to society's problems; (7) stay away from stories when factual content cannot be

68 D. Weaver and G. C. Wilhoit, *The American Journalist: A Portrait of U.S. News People andtheir Work* (Bloomington, in: Indiana University Press, 1986).

verified; (8) investigate claims made by the government; (9) provide interpretations of issues and problems; (10) set the political agenda; (11) be an adversary of the government through skepticism of government actions; (12) be an adversary of business through skepticism of business actions; (13) develop the public's intellectual and cultural interests; (14) discuss national policy while it is being developed; and (15) provide entertainment and relaxation.

The survey also sought to measure journalists' satisfaction with various fac- tors, such as salary, flexibility of hours, relationships with co-workers, career growth, public influence, etc. The survey further included several demographic questions, such as age, years of work experience, level of education, type of news outlet for which a respondent worked, etc.

Before administering the survey, a pretest was conducted among a small group of journalists to ensure that the questionnaire (especially translations) contained no errors. A native English-speaking researcher who speaks fluent Russian translated the survey from English to Russian. A native Russian- speaking researcher who speaks fluent English translated the survey from Russian to English. The authors then compared the translations to check that the survey asked the same questions in both languages. The same steps were followed for the Kyrgyz-language version. Some changes were made during the pretest. Those journalists who participated in the pretest were excluded from the main survey. The study was approved by the authors' university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Sample

It is impossible to know who all the members of Kyrgyzstan's journalist population are because there is no central registry database. Even if there were a central database, it would still be unreliable, since most media outlets officially report having fewer staff members than they actually employ to avoid paying high state taxes—that is, they hire journalists "off the book."69 The authors therefore employed non-probability convenience sampling. This sampling method does not offer generalizability, but it does provide meaningful insight

69 IREX reports that this form of employment is unstable in terms of social security, as such journalists do not make pension contributions or earn tenure. See also B. Kurambayev, "Bribery and Extortion in Kyrgyzstan or Simply Profitable Profession," *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 27, no. 1 (2017): 170–185.

into a very difficult-to-reach population. A total of 247 journalists agreed to complete the survey. The *N* dropped to 211 after initial analysis of returned surveys, for a variety of reasons. Several respondents were younger than 18 (only those over the age of 18 were invited to participate); some only partially completed the survey, leaving the demographic section blank. One participant selected being 18–24 years old yet claimed to have more than 15 years of experience as a journalist.

Overall, 52% of respondents were female (n = 110) and 48% were male (n = 101). In terms of age, 34% of respondents identified themselves as being between 30 and 39 years old, followed by 30% between 25 and 29 and 14% be- tween 40 and 49. The final 20% of the sample was made up of journalists between 18 and 24 years old (13%) and those aged 50 and above (7%).

Almost 79% of participants reported having a university degree, followed by 15% who said they had only completed high school. Just 4% said they had a master's degree and 2% reported having a doctorate. In terms of work experience, 35% (74) reported that they had been working as a journalist for between five and 10 years, followed by 27.5% (58) who had been working as journalists for between two and five years at the time of the survey. Of the remaining respondents, 18.5% (39) said they had between 10 and 15 years of work experience, followed by roughly 11% (23) with less than two years of experience and 8% (17) with more than 15 years of experience in journalism.

Regarding participants' income and contract type, 30% (64) said they made more than 10,000 but less than 15,000 Kyrgyz soms, equal to approximately us$200 at the time of writing (68 Kyrgyz soms = us$1). 23.2% (49) said they earned more than 5,000 but less than 10,000 soms, while 18.5% (39) said they earned less than 5,000 soms on a monthly basis. 14.2% (30) said they earned more than 15,000 but less than 20,000 soms, 8% (16) more than 25,000 soms, and 6% (13) more than 20,000 but less than 25,000 soms per month. Approximately 65% (137) of participants were full-time journalists, followed by 18.5%
(39) who were independent/freelance journalists. 12% (25) were part-time journalists and the remaining 5% (10) selected "other" to describe the nature of their journalistic employment.

Almost one-third of participants (60) worked for online news outlets. 21.3%
(45) said they worked for newspapers, followed closely by 20% (41) who worked for tv, 16% (34) indicating they worked for a magazine, and 15% (31) who were radio journalists. The majority (52%) worked for a private news outlet, while 28% (59) said they worked for state-owned or -funded sources. Almost 11% (23) worked for an international news outlet and the remaining 9% (19) for opposition news outlets.

Findings/Results

rq1 asked how satisfied Kyrgyz journalists were with their jobs. As Table 1 shows, almost half were either "satisfied" (36.5%) or "very satisfied" (4.7%) with their jobs overall. Roughly 58% evaluated themselves as "neutral"—that is, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their situation—while less than one percent said they were "dissatisfied."

The authors sought to determine whether there was a difference in job satisfaction between male journalists and female journalists. To answer this question, an independent samples t-test was computed, comparing the mean score of journalists who identified themselves as men to the mean score of journalists who identified themselves as women. No statistically significant difference was found (t (209)= . 577, p=.565), although the mean for male journalists was slightly higher (M =3.47, sd = .55) than the mean for female journalists (M =3.42, sd = .64).

As part of this broad research question, several smaller tests were conducted to examine individual variables. For example, the authors explored whether monthly income was positively correlated with professional satisfaction. A regression analysis was conducted, with salary as the predictor and satisfaction as the dependent variable. Results showed that one's salary is statistically predictive of professional satisfaction (F=115.37, p=.001). Overall, the model accounts for about 36% of individual differences (R2=.356). Table 2 provides further details.

The authors also tested whether salary would mediate the positive relationship between the level of autonomy and the level of satisfaction. To further test the mediation aspect of H3, a PROCESS, a mediation modeling tool that estimates direct and indirect effects using OLS regression-based path analysis, was used, with autonomy entered as the predictor, salary as the mediator, and satisfaction as the outcome variable. As shown in Table 3, support for this was found: autonomy had a direct effect on salary (.27, p=.001), and salary directly

Table 1 *Job satisfaction among Kyrgyz journalists*

Satisfaction	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very Satisfied	10	4.7
Satisfied	77	36.5
Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied	122	57.8
Dissatisfied	2	0.9
Very Dissatisfied	0	0

influenced satisfaction (.31, *p*=.001). Results show that salary indirectly influenced satisfaction (.08), as the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for indirect effects did not include zero (.04 to .13).

Table 2 *Regression model summary*
(if monthly income is positively correlated with job satisfaction. A regression analysis was conducted with salary as the predictor and satisfaction as the dependent variable).

Model	***ss***	***df***	***ms***	***F***	***p***	***R***	***R2***
Regression	27.11	1	27.11	115.37	.001	.59	.36
Residual	49.11	209	.23				
Total	76.22	210					

Table 2b *Summary of variable weights and structure coefficients*

Variable	*B*	*β*	*r*	*R2*	*p*
constant	2.67				
salary	.39	.59	.59	.36	.001

Table 3 *ols regression-based path analysis of impact of autonomy and salary on professional satisfaction, N = 211.*

	Mediator		**Outcome Variable**	
	Salary		Professional Satisfaction	
	Coeff.	*se*	Coeff.	*se*
Autonomy	.27***	.06	.23***	.03
Salary			.31***	.03
	R2 = .09 *F* (1, 209) = 20.88 *p* < .001		*R2* = .49 *F* (2, 208) = 103.79 *p* < .001	

Coeff. = Unstandardized ols-regression based path analysis coefficients.
se = Standard error.
*$p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Finally, this research question explored whether journalists' perception of their superiors' ability correlates to their overall job satisfaction. To answer this question, a PROCESS model 4 was used, with salary entered as the predictor, perception of superiors' ability as the mediator, and satisfaction as the outcome variable. As shown in Table 4, perception of superiors' ability had an indirect effect on satisfaction (.08), as the bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval for indirect effects did not include zero (.04 to .13).

rq2 asked what roles Kyrgyz journalists believe the news media should play. To answer this question, a principal components analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on the 15-item perceived roles measurement. The Kaiser- Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, kmo= .76. This is well above the acceptable limit of .5.70 An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each factor in the data. Four factors (see Table 2) had eigenvalues over the criterion of 1 and in combination explained 61.28% of the total variance. A scree plot test was also used to determine factors to keep.

The items that cluster on the same factor suggest that factor 1 represents a mobilizer role that consists of four indicators: "motivate people to get involved in public discussion of important issues," "give ordinary people a chance to

Table 4 *ols regression-based path analysis of impact of salary and perceived ability of superiors on professional satisfaction, N = 211.*

	Mediator		**Outcome Variable**	
	Ability of Superiors		Professional Satisfaction	
	Coeff.	*se*	Coeff.	*se*
Salary (predictor)	.46***	.07	.30***	.02
Ability of Superiors			.18***	.03
	R2 = .14 *F* (1, 209) = 34.21 *p* < .001		*R2* = .45 *F* (2, 208) = 87.24 *p* < .001	

Coeff. = Unstandardized ols-regression based path analysis coefficients.se = Standard error.
* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

70 A. Field, *Discovering Statistics Using ibm spss: Sex and Drugs and Rock'n'Roll* (London: sage, 2013).

express their views on public affairs," "point people toward possible solutions to society's problems," and "provide entertainment and relaxation." It accounted for 24.6% of the data's total variance. The second factor represents an analytical-objective factor that consists of two indicators—"stay away from stories when factual content cannot be verified" and "discuss national policy while it is being developed"—and accounted for 16.27% of total variance. The third factor represents an interpreter role and consists of two indicators, "investigate claims and statements by officials and government" and "provide analysis and interpretation of issues and problems." This factor accounted for 12.38% of total variance. Finally, the fourth factor represents a watchdog role that consists of three indicators ("set the political agenda," "be an adversary of the government through skepticism of government actions," and "be an adversary of business through skepticism of business actions").

Reliability analysis was conducted for each factor and they were averaged into indices. The factors were mobilizer (M=3.84, sd=.92, Cronbach's alpha=.79), analytical-objective (M=3.88, sd=.70, Cronbach's alpha=.46), interpreter (M=4.24, sd=.72, Cronbach's alpha=.69), and watchdog role (M=3.92, sd=.83, Cronbach's alpha=.75)

rq3 explored how committed Kyrgyz journalists are to their profession. As Table 6 shows, almost 34% of surveyed journalists said that they wanted to be working for the same media organization five years from now and another 19.4% that they wished to work for a different media organization. On the other side, 34.1% of participants said they did not know whether they planned to keep working in media and almost 12% said they wanted to quit journalism in the next five years.

This question also explored the reasons frequently cited by those who wanted to quit journalism and those who did not know whether they wanted to stay in journalism or move elsewhere. To answer this question, a multiple response tool was used to generate a frequency table. Low salary accounted for the highest share (27.6%) of reasons for choosing to quit journalism, followed by disagreement over editorial policy (21.4%) and excessive pressure (13.3%). For full details, see Table 7.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to assess how journalists in Kyrgyzstan view their role in society and gauge job satisfaction. It is thought to be the first study to examine the professional satisfaction of journalists in post-Soviet Central Asia.

Table 5 *Journalists' perceived roles*
Factor analysis (principal component analysis with varimax) of 15 measures of perceived roles. N=211

Variables	*M*	*sd*	Factor 1: Mobilizer	Factor 2: Analytic-Objective	Factor 3: Interpreter	Factor 4: Watchdog Role
Motivate people to get involved in public discussion of important issues	3.49	.99	.804			
Give ordinary people a chance to express their views on public affairs	3.62	1.08	.772			
Point people toward possible solutions to society's problems	3.63	.95	.742			
Provide entertainment and relaxation	2.86	1.28	.679			
Stay away from stories when factual content cannot be verified	3.29	1.14		.649		
Discuss national policy while it is being developed	3.46	1.10		.646		
Investigate claims and statements made by the government	4.11	.73			.665	
Provide analysis and interpretation of issues and problems	4.13	.80			.600	
Set the political agenda	3.72	.99			.588	
Be an adversary of the government through skepticism of government actions	3.77	1.01			.514	
Be an adversary of business through skepticism of business actions	3.80	.96			.569	
Get information to the public quickly	3.94	1.06		.516		
Develop intellectual and cultural interests of the public	3.95	.71				.728
Concentrate on news that is of interest to the widest possible audience	3.72	.85				.619
Provide analysis and interpretation of international developments	3.53	.94		.501		-.715
Eigenvalues			3.69	2.44	1.85	1.20
% of total variance explained			24.60	16.27	12.38	8.01
Cronbach's α			.79	.46	.72	.75

Table 6 *Kyrgyz journalists' professional commitment*

Commitment	Number of Respondents	Percent
I want to be working for the same media organization in five years	71	33.6
I want to be working for a different media company in five years	41	19.4
I do not know	74	35.1
I wish to quit journalism	25	11.8

Table 7 *Frequently-cited reasons for leaving journalism*

Reasons	Percentage	Cumulative percent
low salary	27.6%	27.6%
disagree with editorial policy	21.4%	49%
too much pressure	13.3%	62.3%
lack of opportunity for promotion	10.6%	72.9%
no prospect of press freedom	10.1%	83%
irregular working hours	8.6%	91.6%
political interference	4.2%	95.8%
other reasons	3.2%	99%
boring/monotonous work	1%	100%

A major contribution of this study is to provide a glimpse of how journalists in this authoritarian context71 see their roles and how satisfied they are with their profession given that freedom of speech and freedom of the press remain luxuries. Such information is important, since journalists' job satisfaction may influence how they perform their job of keeping the public informed about issues that matter to people.72

One key finding is that Kyrgyz journalists see themselves as playing "mobilizational" and "analytical-objective" roles more than being "watchdogs" or "interpreters." This finding is similar to in the United Arab Emirates: journalists

71 B. Kurambayev, "Journalism and Democracy in Kyrgyzstan: The Impact of Victimizationsof the Media Practitioners," *Media Asia*, 43, no. 2 (2016): 102–111.

72 Ireri, "High Job Satisfaction Despite Low Income."

see themselves largely as mobilizers of the population73 in a context where their ability to fulfill a watchdog role is threatened by political repression and socio-economic conditions.74 Meanwhile, Kyrgyz journalists' support for their analytical-objective role—which involves discussing national policy, developing the population's cultural and intellectual interests, and ensuring that news stories are supported by evidence—cuts against claims in the literature that Kyrgyz journalists tend to avoid checking facts.75

The majority of Kyrgyz journalists evaluated their level of job satisfaction as "neutral." One indicator of satisfaction—income—helps explain this: 8 out of 10 journalists are either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their monthly income. To make ends meet, therefore, they may sell "news" (taking payment to write stories that portray a given company/client in a positive light) and accept bribes for writing "news" stories about anyone and anything.76 Overall, Kyrgyz journalists are far less professionally satisfied than their counterparts in the United States and elsewhere. U.S. journalists' level of satisfaction varies by age, gender, race, and the type of organizations for which they work, but "a tiny percentage of journalists ever have said that they were very dissatisfied with their jobs."77 Journalists in Belgium, Slovenia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Kenya, South Korea, and Taiwan also seem to be highly satisfied with their jobs.78 (Lederbogen concluded that journalists in Tanzania, for their part, were relatively dissatisfied.)79 Gender was not statistically significant among Kyrgyz journalists, although the existing literature suggests that women tend to be less satisfied than men.80

This study further contributes to the literature around the idea that their supervisor's ability affects journalists' professional satisfaction. Brownlee and Beam suggested that journalists tend to rate job satisfaction "highly when they get a lot of feedback and comments from their supervisors about their work."81

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73 Kirat, "Journalists in the United Arab Emirates."

74 Kenny and Gross, "Journalism in Central Asia."

75 IREX, "Media Sustainability Index (MSI) 2016."

76 Mould and Schuster, "Central Asia: Ethics—A Western Luxury."

77 Beam, Weaver, and Brownlee, "Changes in Professionalism of U.S. Journalists."

78 P. Lah and S. Zilic-Fiser, "Journalists in Slovenia," in D.H. Weaver and L. Willnat (eds.), *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 458–470.

79 U. Lederbogen, *Watchdog or Missionary? A Portrait of African News People and their Work. A Case Study of Tanzania* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

80 B. Brownlee and R. Beam, "us Journalists in the Tumultuous Early Years of the 21st Century," in D.H. Weaver and L. Willnat (eds.), *The Global Journalist in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 348–362.

81 Ibid., 354.

It is possible that this is what Kyrgyz journalists feel they are missing, leading them to rate their job satisfaction lower.

We also find that Kyrgyz journalists have mixed levels of commitment to their professions. However, much though they may want to move to other professions, there are few opportunities in the country, due to Kyrgyzstan's poverty and deteriorating economy. Indeed, two million Kyrgyz citizens are currently migrant workers in Russia.

Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations of this study need to be noted. First, the data was collected using convenience sampling. Using a probability approach might yield different findings. It is recommended that future studies include probability sampling in order to generalize the results to the wider journalist population. Second, journalists completed the survey in short periods of time, such as before or after news conferences, often in the presence of the main author. This time pressure may have caused them to over- or under-estimate in their responses to questions; some respondents may also have given the answers they thought the researchers wanted to hear. Third, only journalists physically located in Bishkek participated. Future studies should engage with journalists working outside the capital.