

# THE AMERICAN JOURNALIST UNDER ATTACK

**Media, Trust & Democracy**  
Key Findings 2022



*Lars Willnat, David H. Weaver, & Cleve Wilhoit*

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*The American Journalist Under Attack: Key Findings 2022*  
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## Executive Summary

This survey continues the series of major national studies of U.S. journalists begun in 1971 by sociologist John Johnstone and continued in 1982, 1992, 2002, and 2013 by David Weaver, Cleve Wilhoit and their colleagues at Indiana University. Few studies of a profession as important as journalism can claim a half-century's analytical perspective on the work, professional attitudes, and ethics from large samples of the people working in it. That's what this study does with its contribution of important decennial measures of the pulse of American journalism.

This present study, based on an online survey with 1,600 U.S. journalists conducted in early 2022, updates these findings and adds new ones concerning democracy and threats to journalism. Overall, the findings suggest that the past decade has had significant effects on U.S. journalists, some more negative than positive.

Compared to 2013, the latest demographic profile reveals that U.S. journalists are now slightly more educated on average and more likely to identify as Democrats or Independents. While the gender pay gap has narrowed, there are still significantly more men than women in the profession, and fewer racial or ethnic minorities than in the general population.

U.S. journalists today are slightly more satisfied with their work and more likely to say they have complete autonomy to select stories. However, about six in 10 journalists say that journalism is headed in the wrong direction, and more than four in 10 say that their news staffs have shrunk in 2021 rather than remained the same or grown.

Other findings also indicate that U.S. journalists are less likely to consider reaching the widest possible audiences and getting information to the public quickly as very important roles, and more likely to emphasize the importance of investigating government claims.

U.S. journalists continue to rely heavily on social media in their daily work, despite more than half of the journalists also thinking social media have negative impacts on their profession. Most use social media to check for breaking news and to monitor what other news organizations are doing, and few use these interactive media for interviewing sources.

One of the starkest findings is the gender differences in abuse now experienced by a majority of journalists. Female journalists were 7-to-14 times more likely to have experienced sexism and about 10 times more likely to have encountered threats of sexual violence, both online and offline.

Additional findings are available online at [www.theAmericanJournalist.org](http://www.theAmericanJournalist.org)

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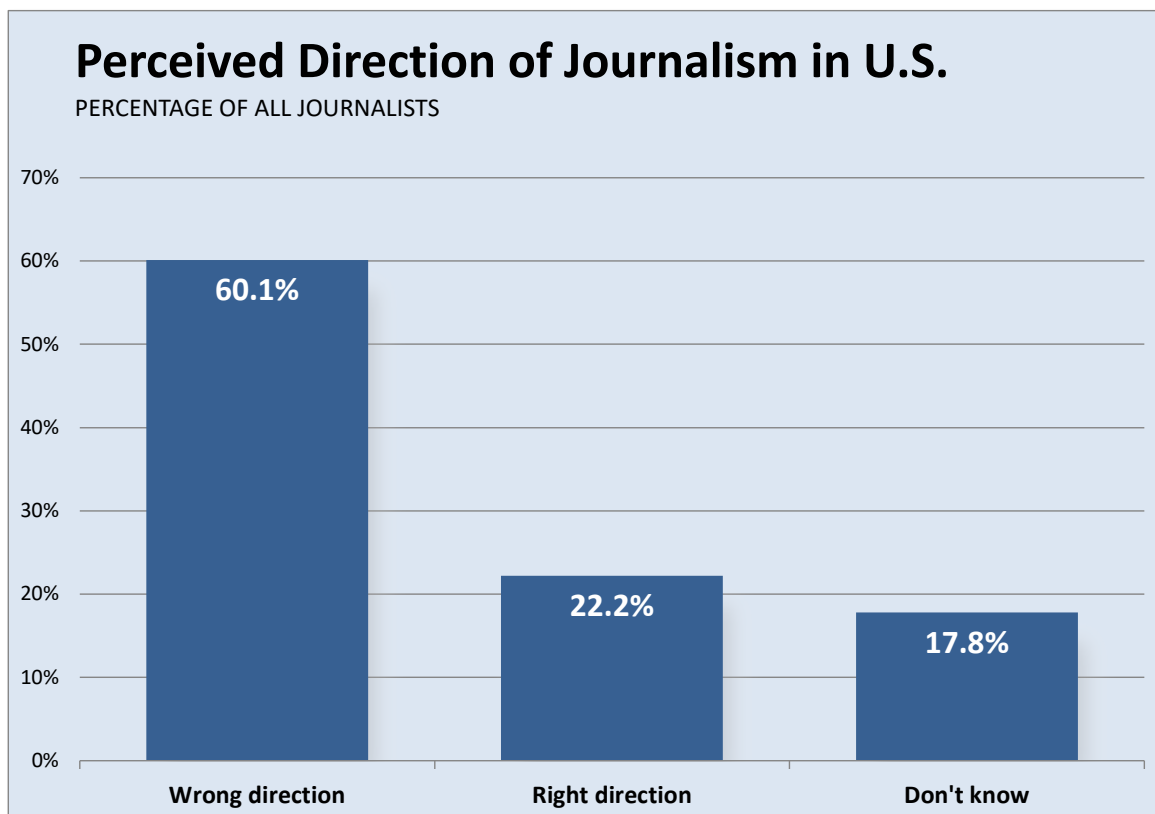
The authors would like to thank the S.I. Newhouse School at Syracuse University and the John Ben Snow Foundation for their generous support of this study.

# 1. Most Still See Journalism Going In 'Wrong Direction'

Journalists in the United States have enjoyed a prominent and influential status in society as the “Fourth Estate” of government. Yet this position of esteem seems to have eroded in recent years within the context of a similar decline of public trust in other major American institutions. Slightly less than one-fourth (22.2 percent) of the respondents said that journalism in the United States was headed in the right direction, compared to nearly triple that number (60.1

percent) who saw journalism going in the wrong direction, about the same as a decade ago.

When asked about the “most important problem facing journalism today,” the journalists mentioned these issues most often: Declining public trust in the news media (20.8 percent); shrinking local and community news coverage (12.8 percent); perceived bias and opinion journalism (12.7 percent); fake news (9.9 percent); disrupted business model (9.3 percent).



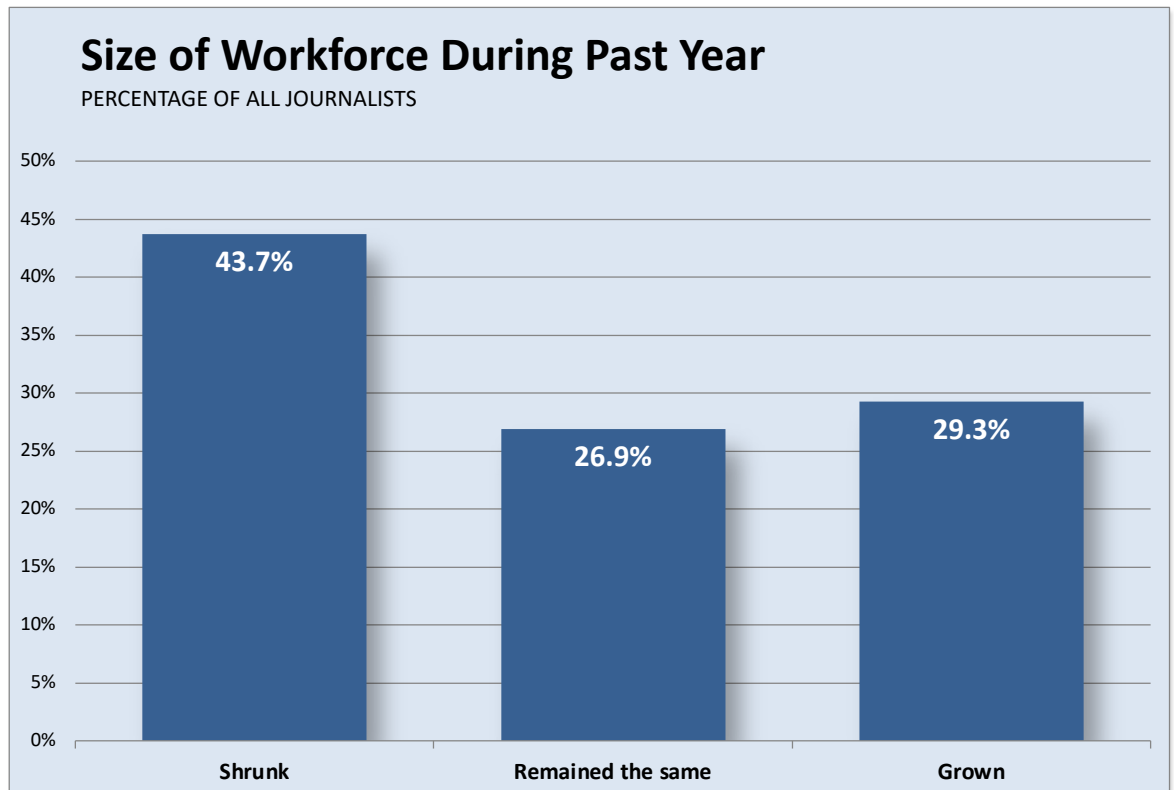
## 2.

# Newsrooms Are Still Shrinking

About four in 10 U.S. journalists (43.7 percent) reported that their workforces had shrunk in the past year, while less than one-third (29.3 percent) said that their staff numbers had increased. Another quarter (26.9 percent) reported that their newsroom size remained the same.

This was a more positive report than a decade ago, when 62.6 percent reported smaller workforces and only 13.2 percent said their newsrooms had grown.

Estimates from our previous surveys found that the full-time editorial workforce in the U.S. news media shrank from about 116,000 in 2002 to 83,000 in 2013. It appears the decline may have stopped as Pew estimates about 85,000 news and editorial personnel are now in the profession. And the new data reported here suggest that journalists adept at working in the digital media environment are in demand and that workforce growth may follow.



## 3.

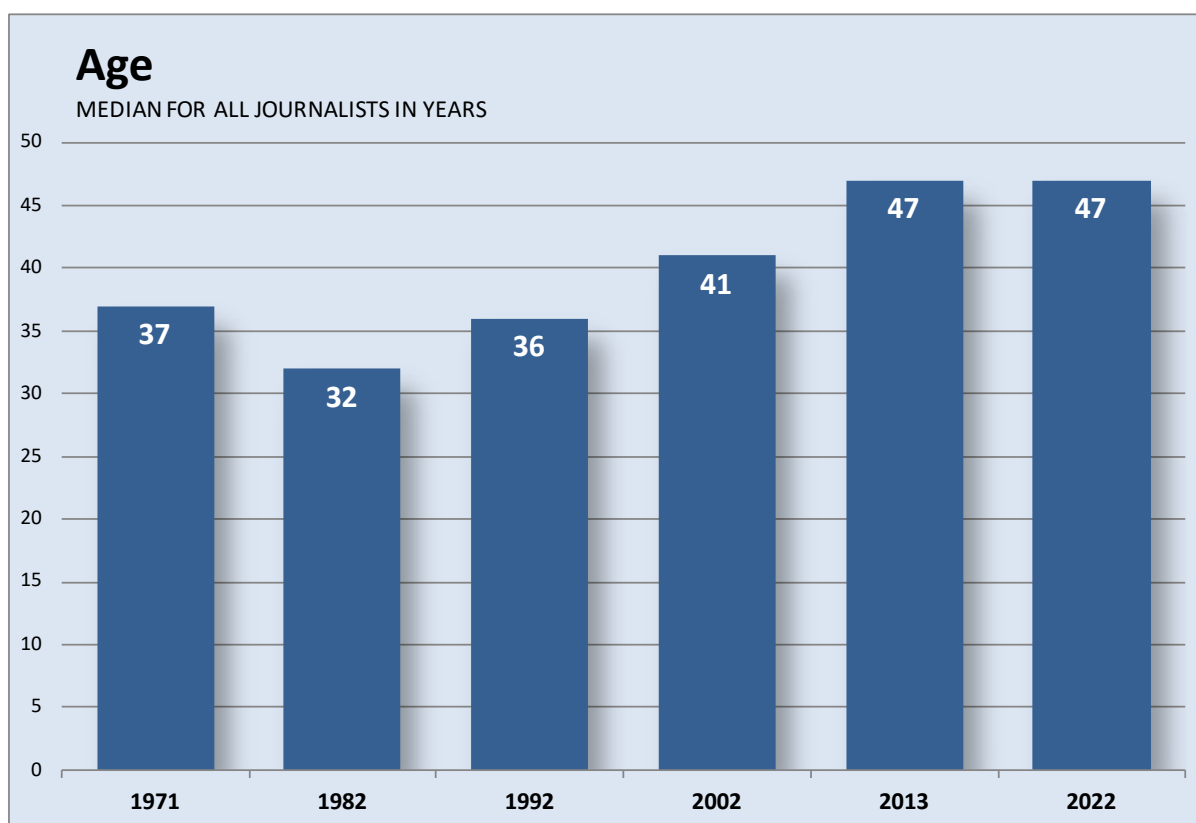
## Journalists' Median Age **Steady**

A decade ago, the median age of full-time U.S. journalists rose to 47 years and remains that now, significantly older than the median age (42 years) of the U.S. labor force. This “graying” of the profession during the decade before our 2013 study was significant in that for the first time in a half-century journalists tended to be considerably older than the overall American labor force, belying the 1980s image of journalism as a “young people’s” profession.

These findings likely reflect the aging of the baby boomer generation. During the 1970s, boomers inflated the 25- to 34-year-old age bracket in the American Journalist survey. In the 1980s, they inflated the 35- to

44-year-old group. In the 1990s, the boomers moved into the 45- to 54-year-old age group, which increased from 14 percent of all journalists to 28 percent. This trend reversed when the boomers reached the 55- to 64-year-old age group in the 2000s and accounted for only 22 percent of all journalists in 2013.

Among the various media, the median age pattern is roughly similar to a decade ago. Older journalists tended to work for wire services (median age 56 years), radio (54 years), and daily (53 years) and weekly (51 years) newspapers. Younger journalists were found working for television stations (43 years), online media (41 years), and news magazines (40 years).



## 4.

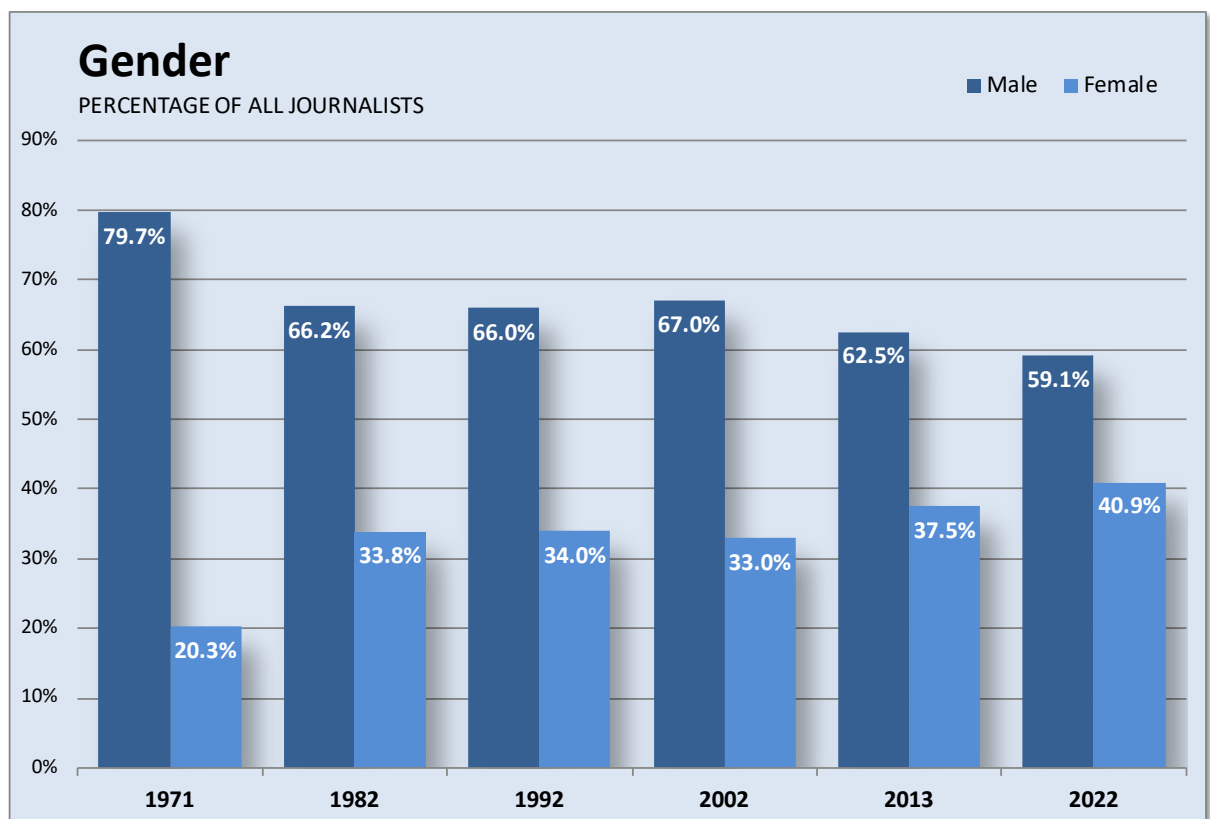
## Slight Increase In The Number Of Women Journalists

The percentage of women journalists in the United States has increased from 37.5 percent in 2013 to 40.9 percent in 2022. Women still represent less than half of all full-time journalists working for U.S. news media, but compared to only one-fifth in the field being women in 1971, this represents a doubling of that proportion.

Among the various media, the proportion of the staffs who are women is roughly similar to a decade ago, except for news magazines and online where women are now a much larger minority. They now make up 43.9 percent of news magazine staff and 40.4 percent

of online staff, about 10 percentage points more than a decade ago. Television (44.1 percent) and radio (43.7 percent) staffs have the highest proportion of women, closely followed by weekly newspapers (41.7 percent). As a decade ago, daily newspapers (37.2 percent) and wire services (34.1 percent) employ the fewest women.

Compared to the U.S. civilian workforce in 2020, U.S. journalists are somewhat less likely to be women (40.9 percent vs. 47 percent) and even less likely than the overall U.S. managerial and professional workforce, which was 52 percent women in 2021.

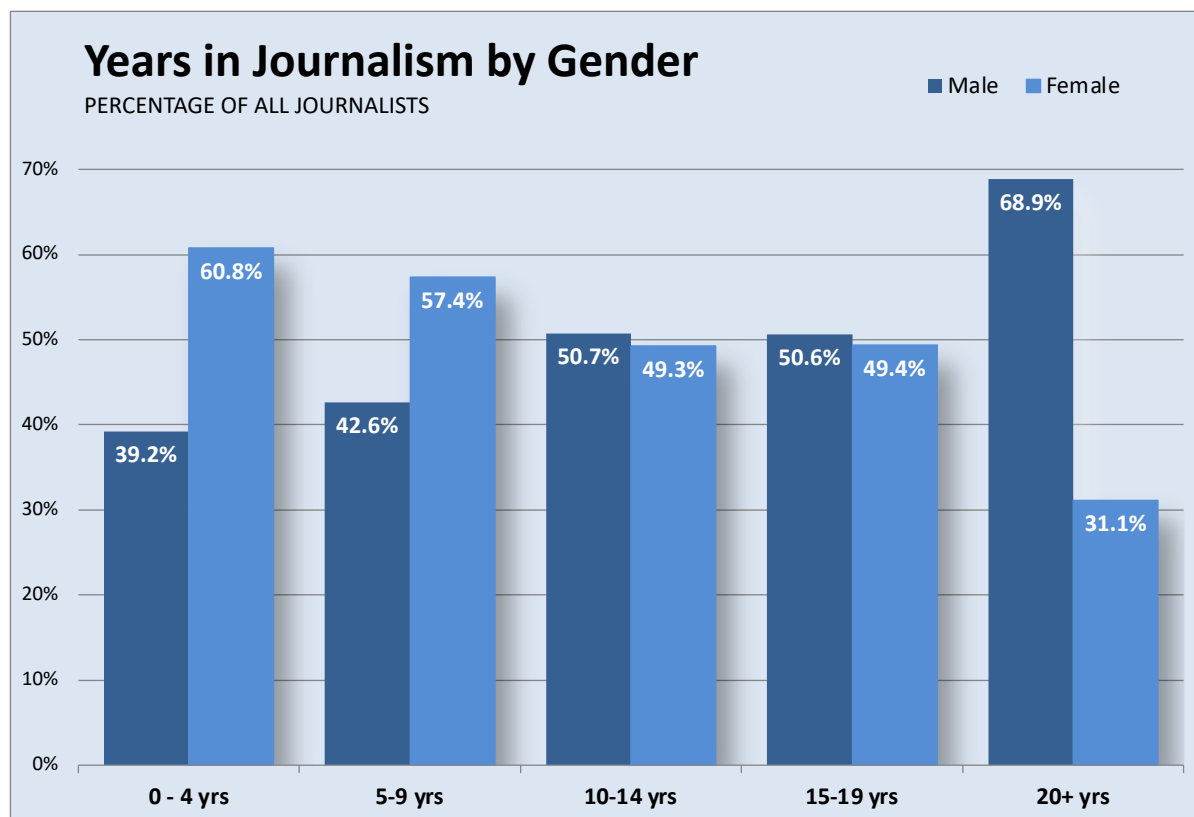


# 5. Women Journalists Tend To Leave Profession Earlier

Women are not only underrepresented in journalism overall, but they also tend to be concentrated among those with less than 10 years of professional experience. Among U.S. journalists with less than five years of work experience, women significantly outnumber men, with 60.8 percent working in the profession. However, unlike a decade

ago, the percentages of women in the middle-level-years of experience now are at parity with men.

The largest gap is found among journalists with 20 or more years of experience, where only about one-third (31.1 percent) are women. Thus, retention of women in journalism is still a problem.



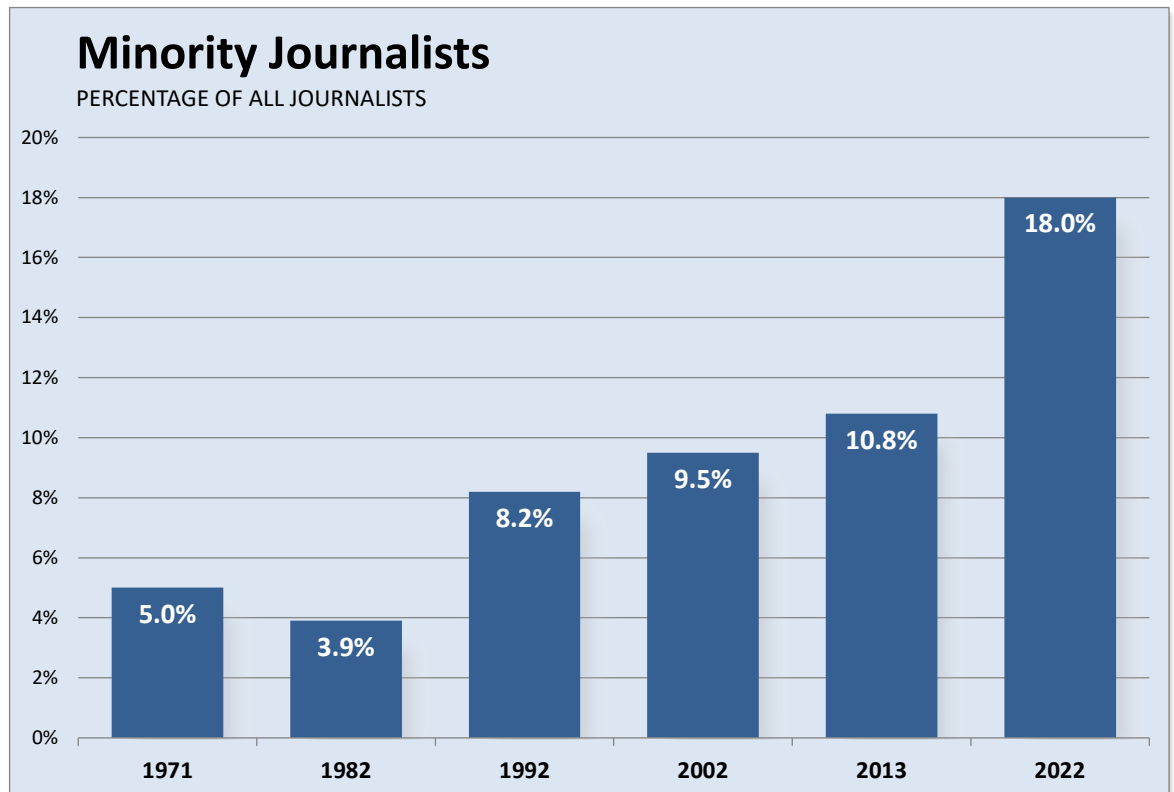


## 6.

## Increase In The Number Of Minority Journalists

The number of full-time minority journalists working for the U.S. news media has significantly increased from 10.8 percent in 2013 to 18 percent in 2022. The 7-point increase in minority journalists is the largest in one decade since 1971. Minority journalists in the United States are more likely to be women (54.8 percent) than are white journalists (37.6 percent). In addition, among all U.S. journalists with less than five years experience, 30.5 percent are minorities, suggesting that efforts by media organizations to hire minorities in the past few years have been at least somewhat successful.

Television (26.8 percent) and radio (17.3 percent) employ the largest percentage of minority journalists, up significantly from a decade ago (22 percent and 11.3 percent). Online media almost doubled their employment of minorities over the decade, increasing to 16.8 percent in 2022. Daily newspapers (14.7 percent) and wire services (14.1 percent) also increased minority employment significantly over the decade. News magazines (10.5 percent) and weekly newspapers (5.7 percent) have roughly the same number of minority journalists as a decade ago.



## 7.

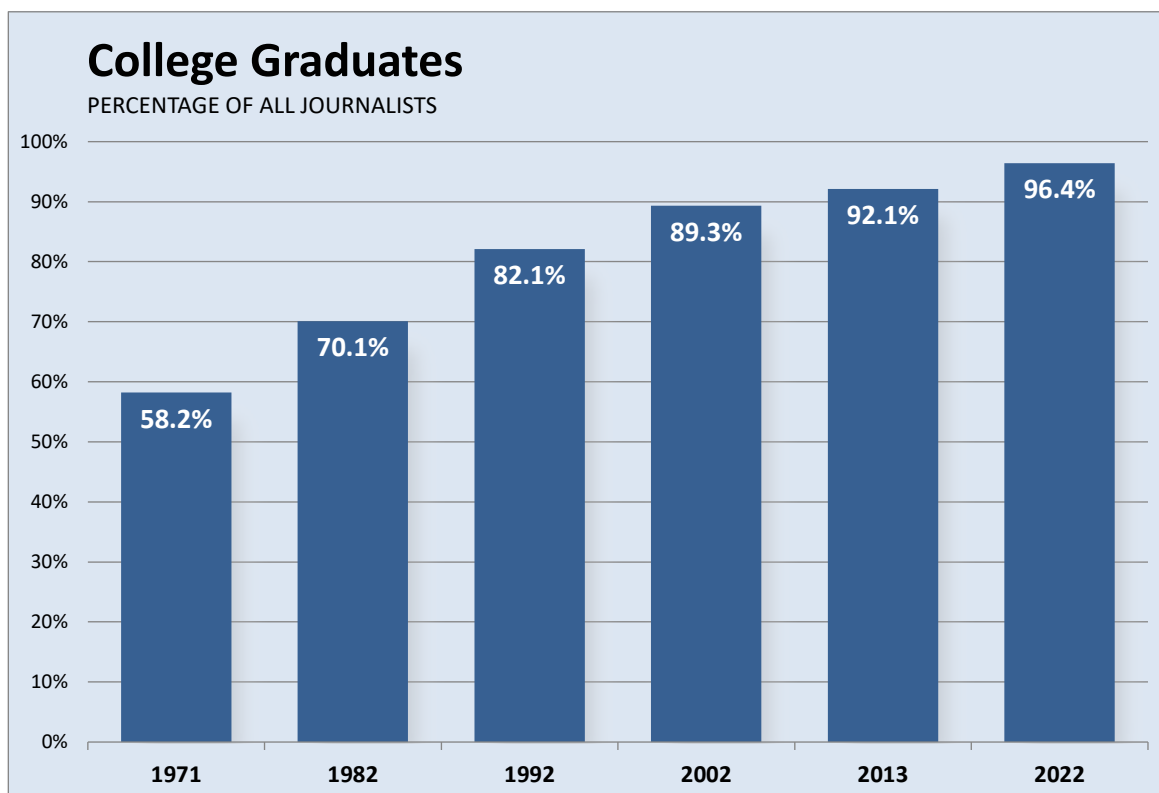
## Journalists Are More Likely To Be College Graduates

The percentage of U.S. journalists with at least a college bachelor's degree continues to increase. It's clear that a four-year bachelor's degree is the main qualification necessary for being hired as a journalist in most U.S. news media organizations. Only 3.6 percent of full-time journalists do not have a bachelor's degree.

Of those with a degree, 45.1 percent were journalism majors in college, which increased from 37.4 percent in 2013, and is the highest percentage since we first asked this question in 1982. When those who majored in radio-TV, telecommunication, mass communication, or communication are added, the proportion increases

to 60.6 percent. In sum, six in 10 of all U.S. journalists with college degrees have majored in journalism or communication. The largest proportion of journalism majors is found in television (55.2 percent), followed by weekly newspapers (49.7 percent), daily newspapers (46.8 percent), wire services (42.4 percent), online news organizations (31.2 percent), radio (23.1 percent), and news magazines (21.1 percent).

Overall, U.S. journalists in 2022 are much more likely to have earned college degrees than the adult population in the United States (32.9 percent), according to the 2020 U.S. Census.



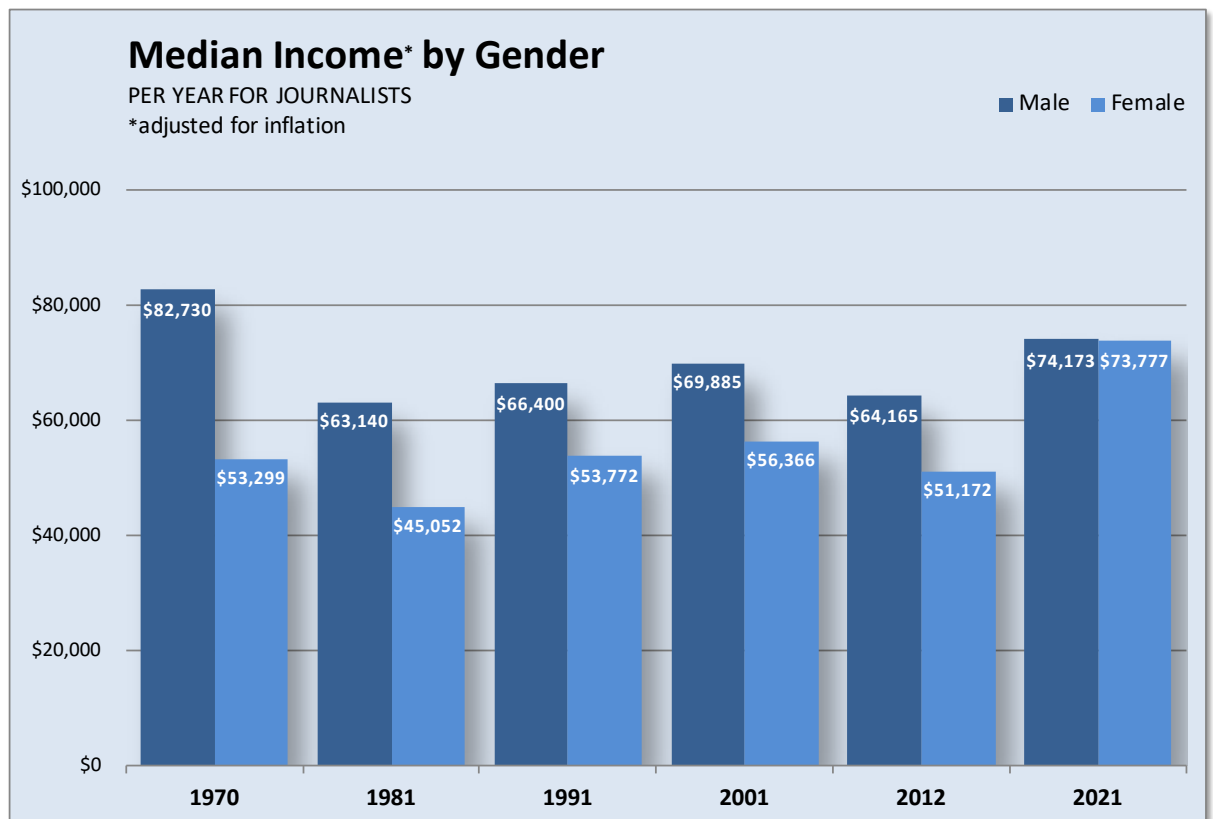
8.

# Gender Pay Gap Closes

The median annual salary for U.S. journalists rose to \$74,010 in 2021, an increase of about \$13,000 over the median salary in 2012 (\$61,079, adjusted for inflation). While the median salary for male journalists increased by 15.7 percent (\$10,008) during the past decade (and thus falling behind the 25.2 percent inflation that occurred between 2012 and 2021), women journalists' median salary increased by

44.2 percent (\$22,605) during the same time period.

Thus, the gender pay gap, which has been a consistent feature of U.S. journalists' salaries during the past five decades, appears to have almost closed in 2021 with women journalists earning \$396 less than their male colleagues (journalists were asked about their income for the previous year).



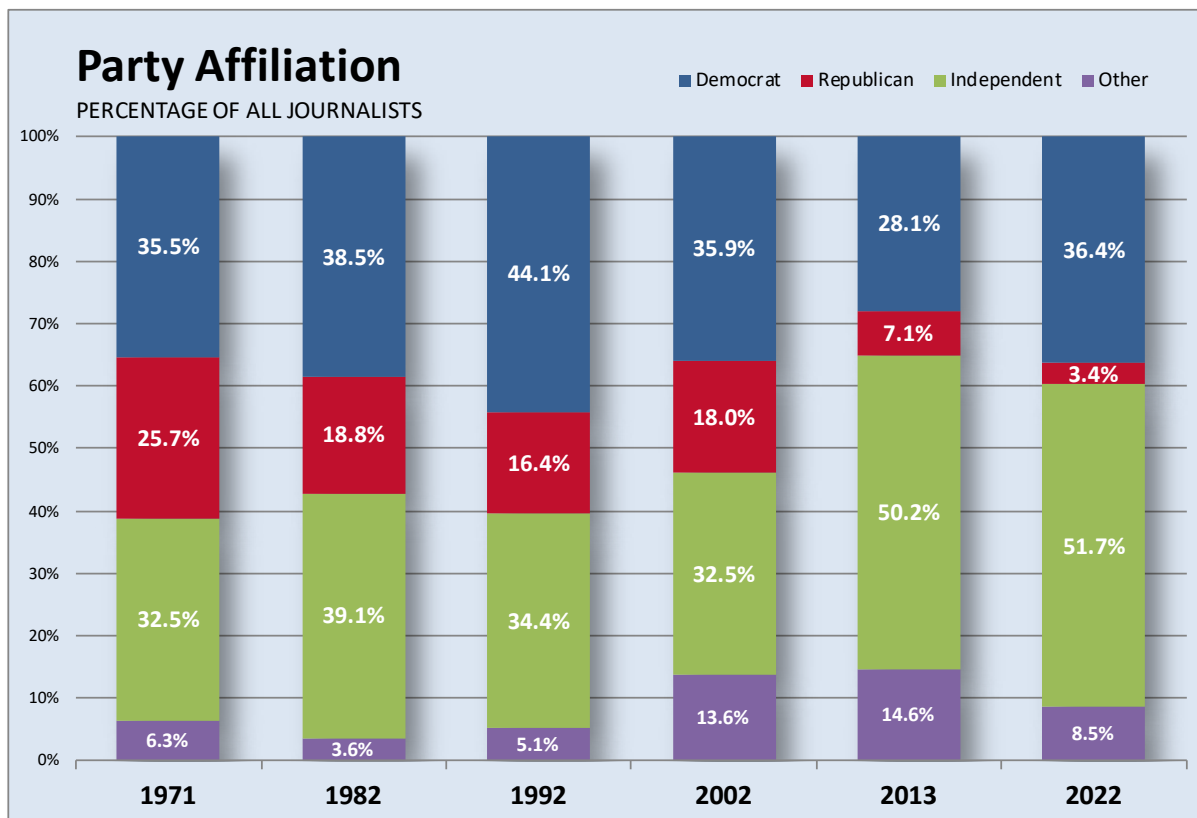
## 9.

## More Journalists Say They Are Democrats

Compared with 2013, the percentage of full-time U.S. journalists who claim to be Democrats has increased 8 percentage points in 2022 to about 36 percent, a figure higher than the overall population percentage of 27 percent, according to a 2022 ABC News/Washington Post national poll. This is the third highest percentage of journalists saying they are Democrats since 1971.

Journalists who said they were Republicans continued to drop from 18 percent in 2002 and 7.1 percent in

2013 to 3.4 percent in 2022. This figure is notably lower than the percentage of U.S. adults who identified with the Republican party (26 percent according to the poll mentioned earlier) in 2022. About half of all journalists (51.7 percent) said they were Independents, which is about 12 percentage points above the figure for all U.S. adults (40 percent). Overall, U.S. journalists today are much more likely to identify themselves as Independents rather than Democrats or Republicans—a pattern similar to 2013.



## 10.

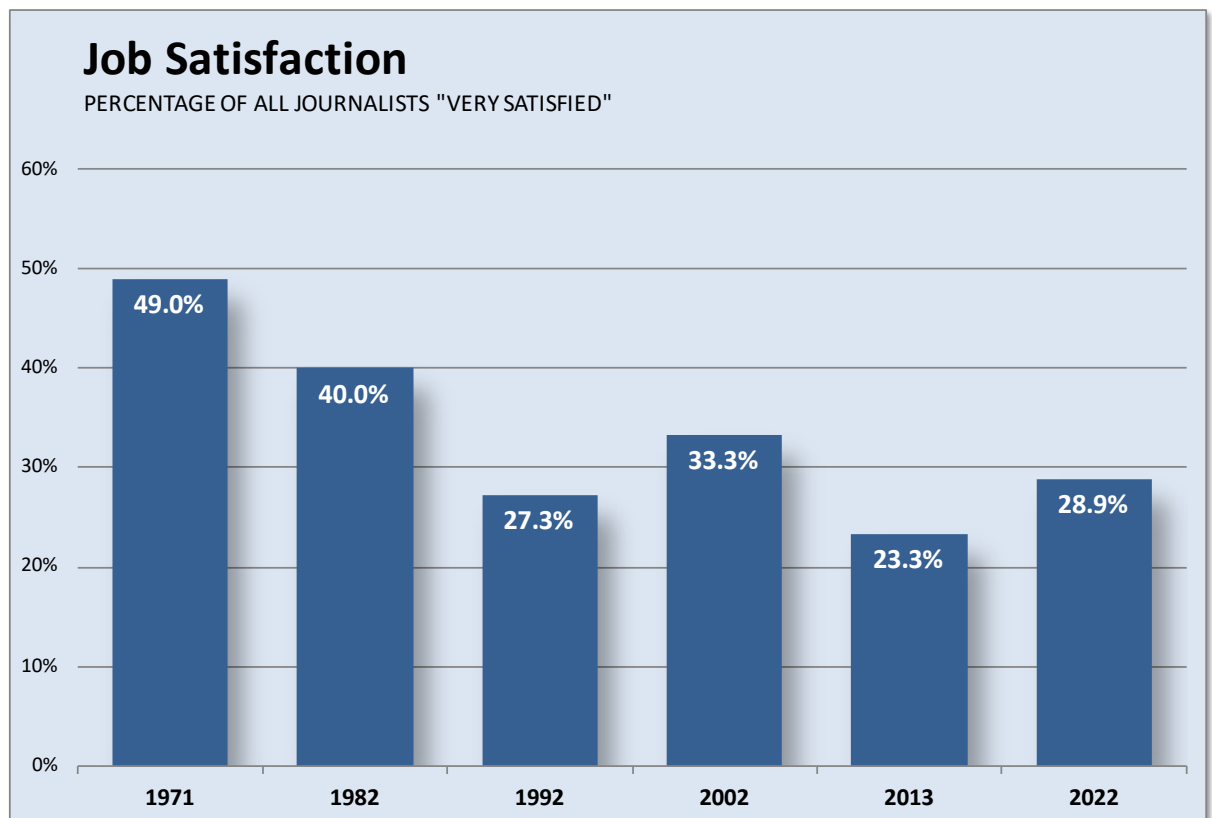
# Perceived **Job Satisfaction** Increases Slightly

Our surveys over several decades showed significant and steady decline in perceived job satisfaction, except for a small positive bounce in 2002.

But the most recent data, somewhat surprisingly, suggest another uptick, belying the popular commentary. Job satisfaction has increased from 23.3 percent of journalists

who said they were very satisfied with their jobs in 2013 to 28.9 percent who said so in 2022.

Overall, about a quarter (23.7 percent) of all U.S. journalists said they were either somewhat or very dissatisfied with their jobs. This represents a slight decrease from 2013 when 25.5 percent said they were somewhat or very dissatisfied.



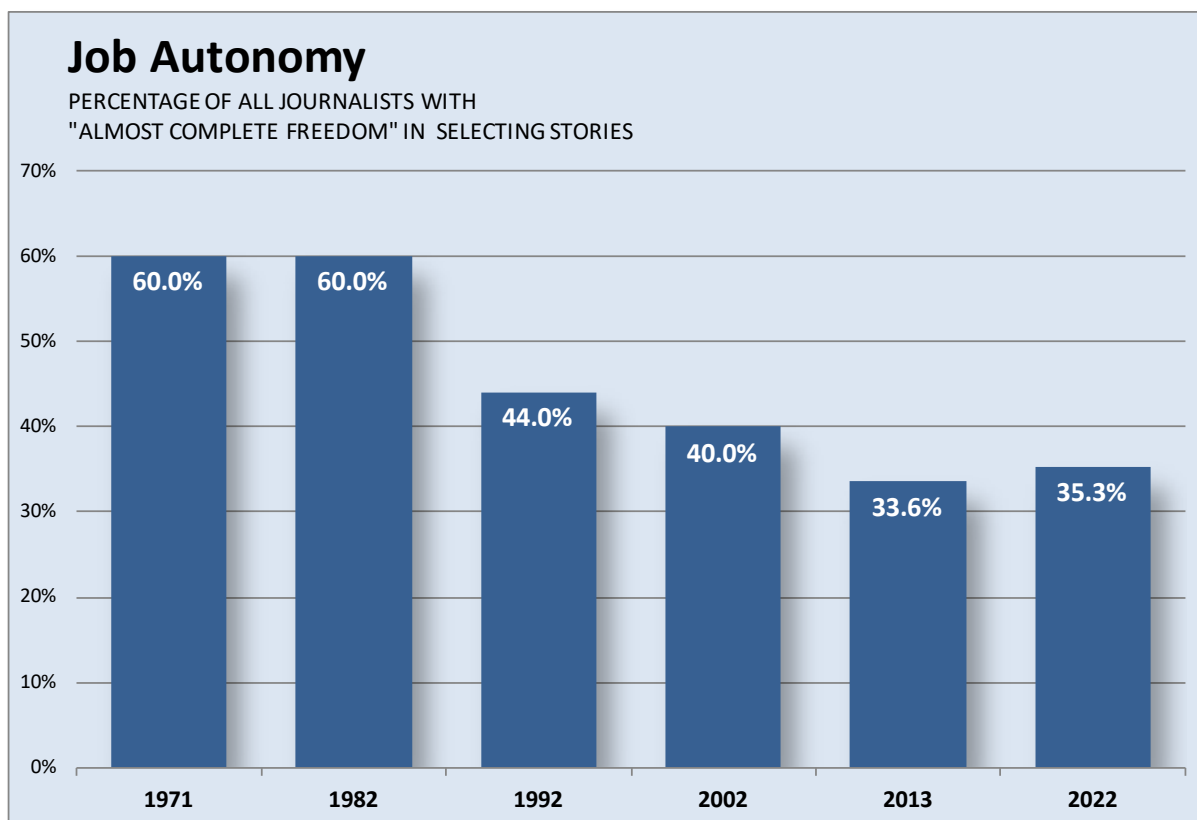
## 11.

# Perceived **Job Autonomy** Also Increases

Journalism has been called a “semi-profession” in part because its claims to workplace autonomy have not been as firmly established as in many other professions. In 1971, Johnstone speculated that journalists’ job autonomy might be undermined by the fact that most journalists worked in large, hierarchical media organizations. Following the Johnstone study, our surveys of U.S. journalists conducted between 1982 and 2013 docu-

mented a continuing erosion of perceived job autonomy in the nation’s newsrooms. While a majority (60 percent) of journalists said that they had “almost complete freedom” in selecting their stories in 1971 and 1982, only a third (33.6 percent) said so in 2013.

This trend was halted in 2022, as slightly more than one-third (35.3 percent) of journalists said they had “almost complete freedom” in selecting their stories.



# 12.

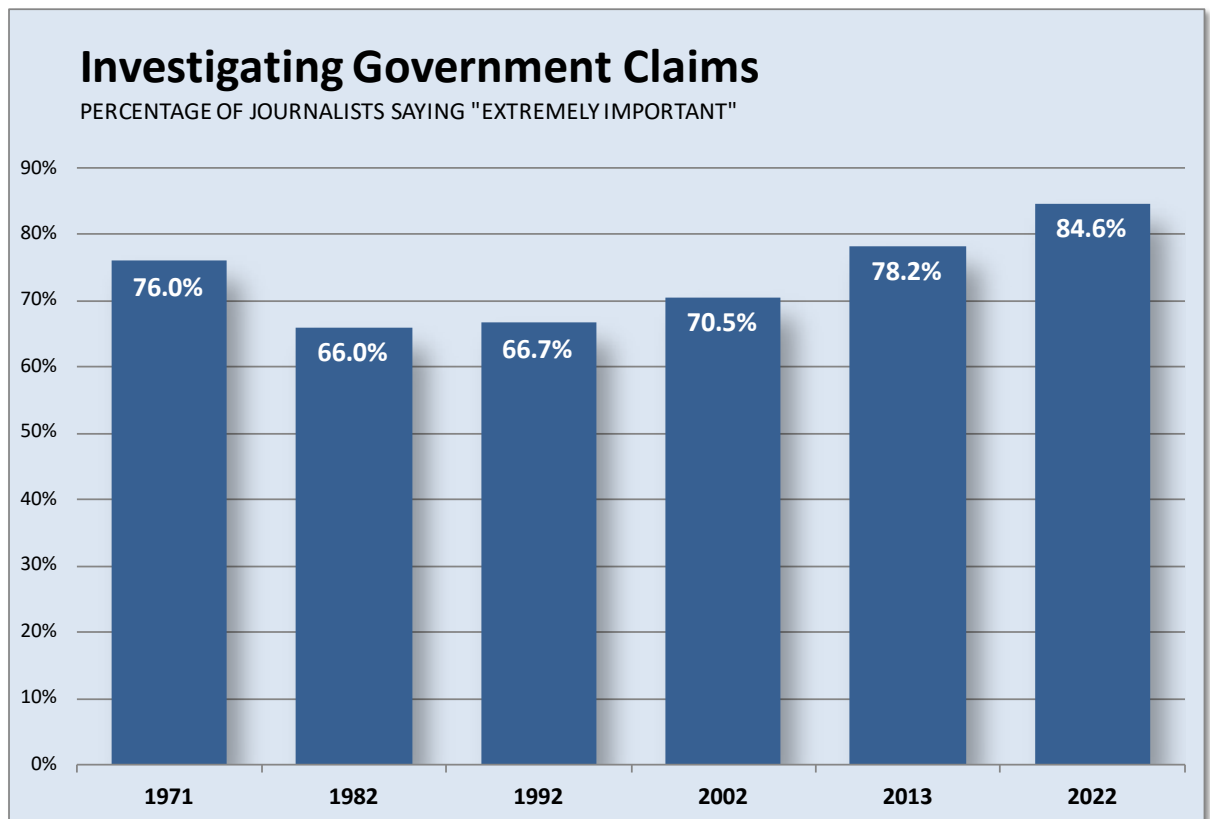
## Government 'Watchdog' Role Increases

All six surveys conducted since 1971 included a series of questions that asked journalists about how they perceive the main functions of the news media in the United States. Responses to these questions provide a fairly detailed picture of how these role perceptions have changed during the past five decades.

When asked about the importance of a number

of things that the news media do or try to do, more than eight in 10 journalists (84.6 percent) said that the role of "investigating government claims" is extremely important. This percentage represents a 6-point increase from 2013.

Thus, journalists still consider the role of "government watchdog" as one of the most important functions of the U.S. news media.

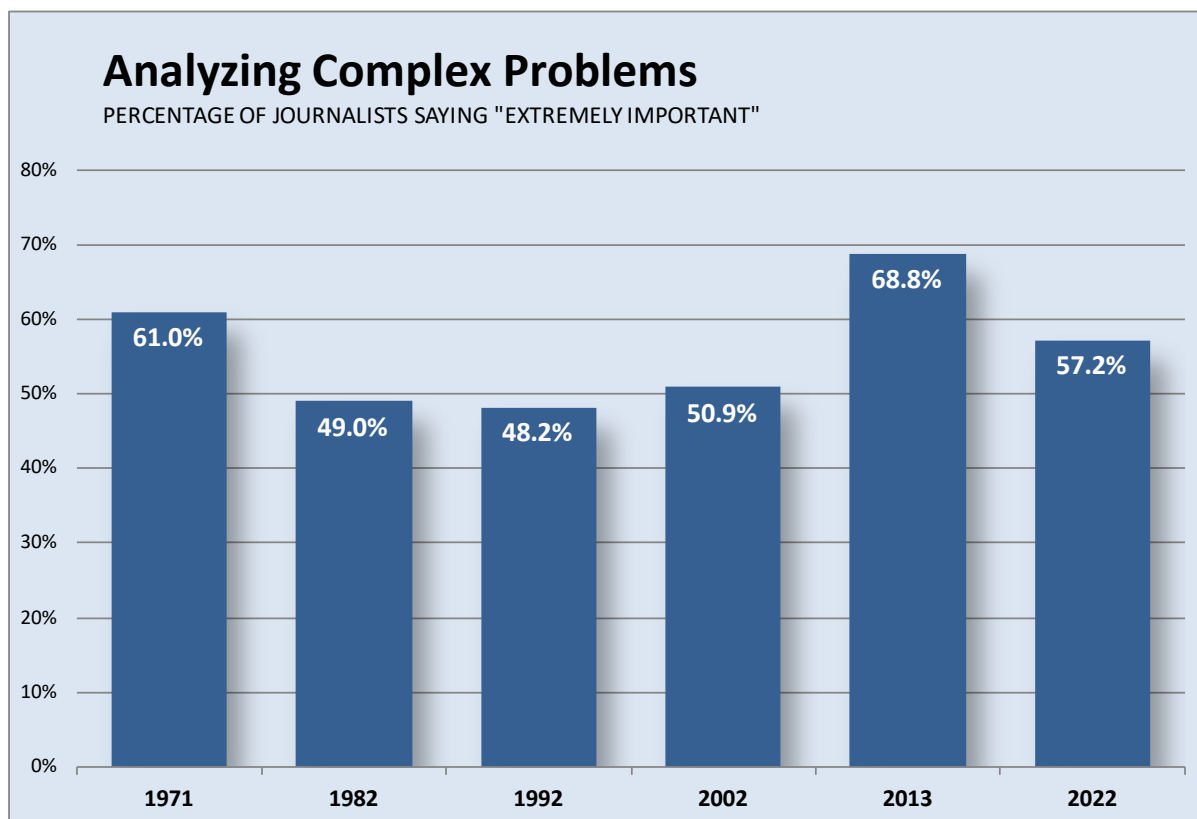


## 13.

## Fewer Journalists Value ‘Analyzing Complex Problems’

A majority of U.S. journalists (57.2 percent) also said that “analyzing complex problems” in society is extremely important. However, this percentage represents a drop of almost 12 points from 2013, similar to the drop in importance observed between 1971 and 1982.

Thus, while it appears that the focus of U.S. journalism has shifted somewhat during the past decade, it is clear that “investigating government claims” and “analyzing complex problems” remain the most important professional roles among U.S. journalists in 2022.





## 14.

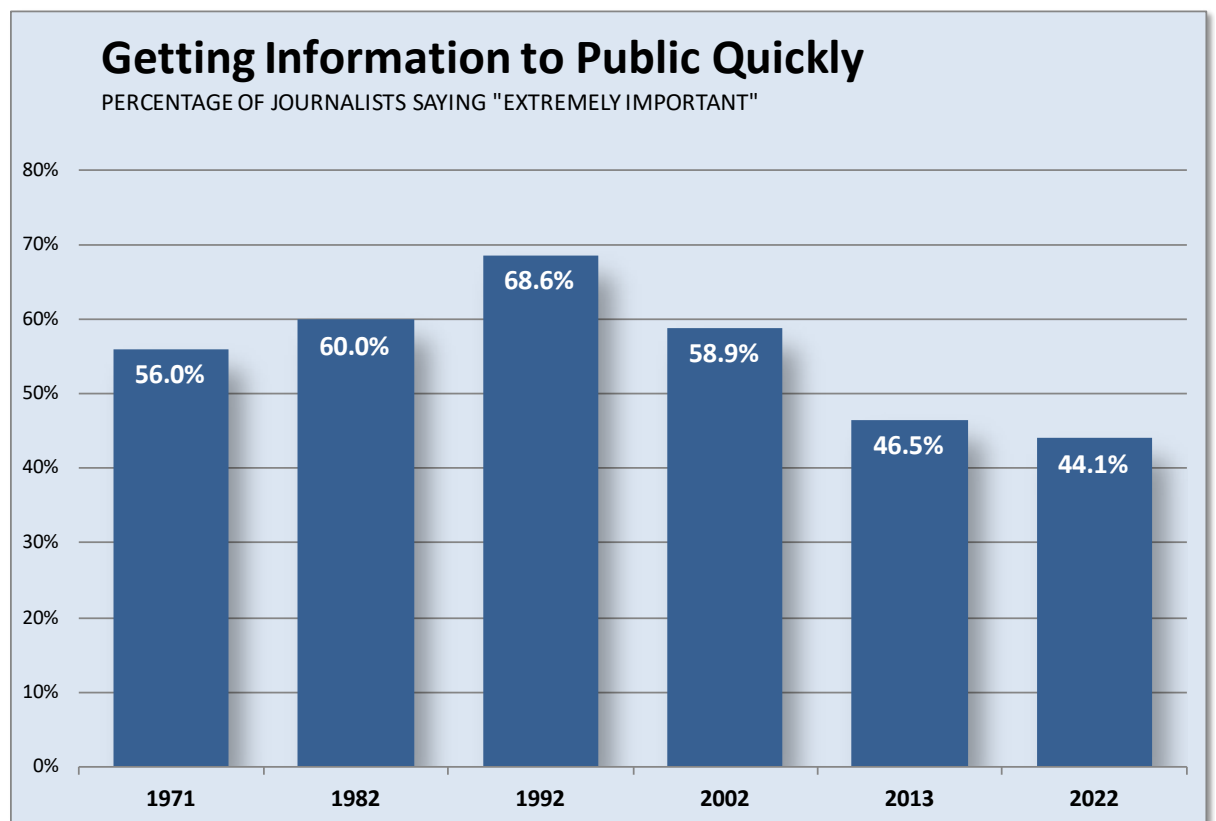
# ‘Getting Information Out Quickly’ Drops Again

While “investigating government claims” and “analyzing complex problems” are both considered important journalistic functions, the role of “getting information to the public quickly” continues to drop in perceived importance.

In 1992, 68.6 percent of U.S. journalists said it was extremely important. Thirty years later, only 44.1 percent thought this role to be extremely important. However, during the same three

decades, the proportion rating the role of “investigating government claims” and “analyzing complex problems” increased by about 18 and 9 percent, respectively.

Thus, U.S. journalists may have recognized that their real strengths lie in providing investigative reports and analyses rather than quick information, especially in a digital media environment where news is distributed instantly.

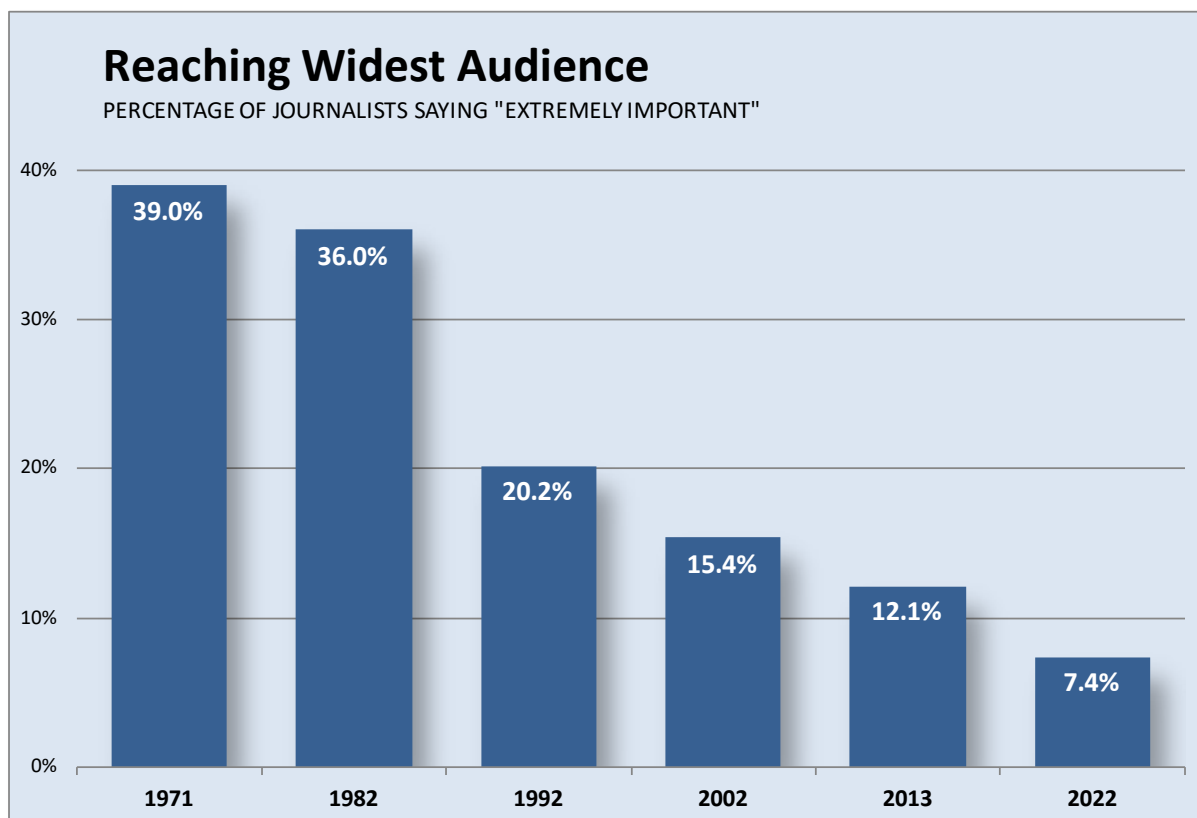


# 15.

## 'Reaching A Mass Audience' Continues To Decline

In the era of specialized niche media, declining numbers of U.S. journalists said that concentrating on news that is of interest to "the widest possible audience" is important. While about four in 10 (39 percent) of U.S. journalists considered that role extremely important in 1971, this percentage dropped to 7.4 percent in 2022, the lowest ever.

The perception of a shrinking target audience may be driven, in part, by the digitization of mainstream news media that enables them to reach narrower audiences with tailored content. In addition, the explosion of new online niche media that attract a growing number of young and educated news consumers makes the idea of a mass audience somewhat obsolete.



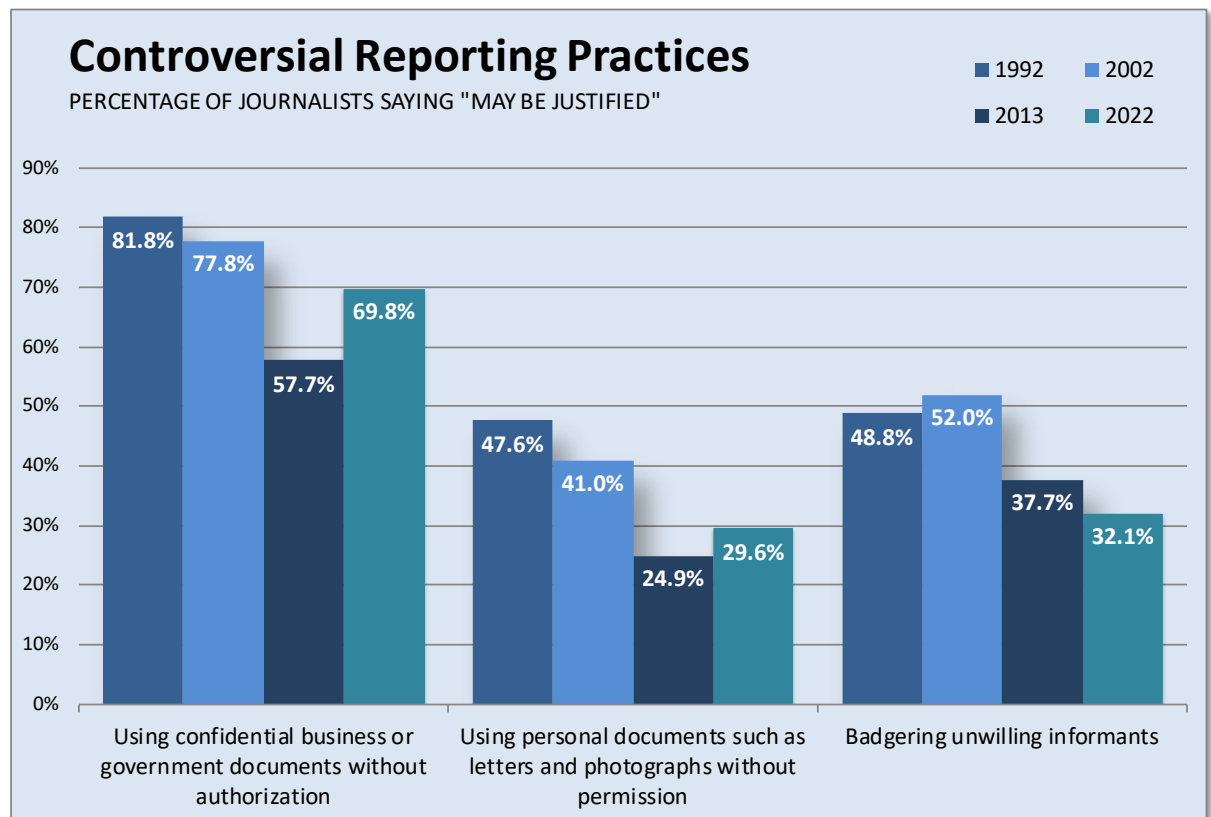
## 16

## More Justify Use Of Documents Without Permission

Journalists also were asked whether several controversial reporting practices “may be justified on occasion” if the situation involved an important story.

Our findings indicate that U.S. journalists in 2022 were notably more willing to endorse the practices of using documents without permission than in 2013. For example, the percentage of U.S. journalists endorsing the occasional use of “confidential business or government documents without authorization” increased

significantly from 57.7 percent in 2013 to 69.8 percent in 2022. Similarly, the percentage of those who justify the occasional use of “personal documents without permission” increased slightly from 24.9 percent in 2013 to 29.6 percent in 2022. On the other hand, support for the occasional “badgering or harassing of unwilling informants” fell from 37.7 percent to 32.1 percent during the same period. Overall, journalists are less tolerant of these controversial reporting practices than three decades ago in 1992.



## 17.

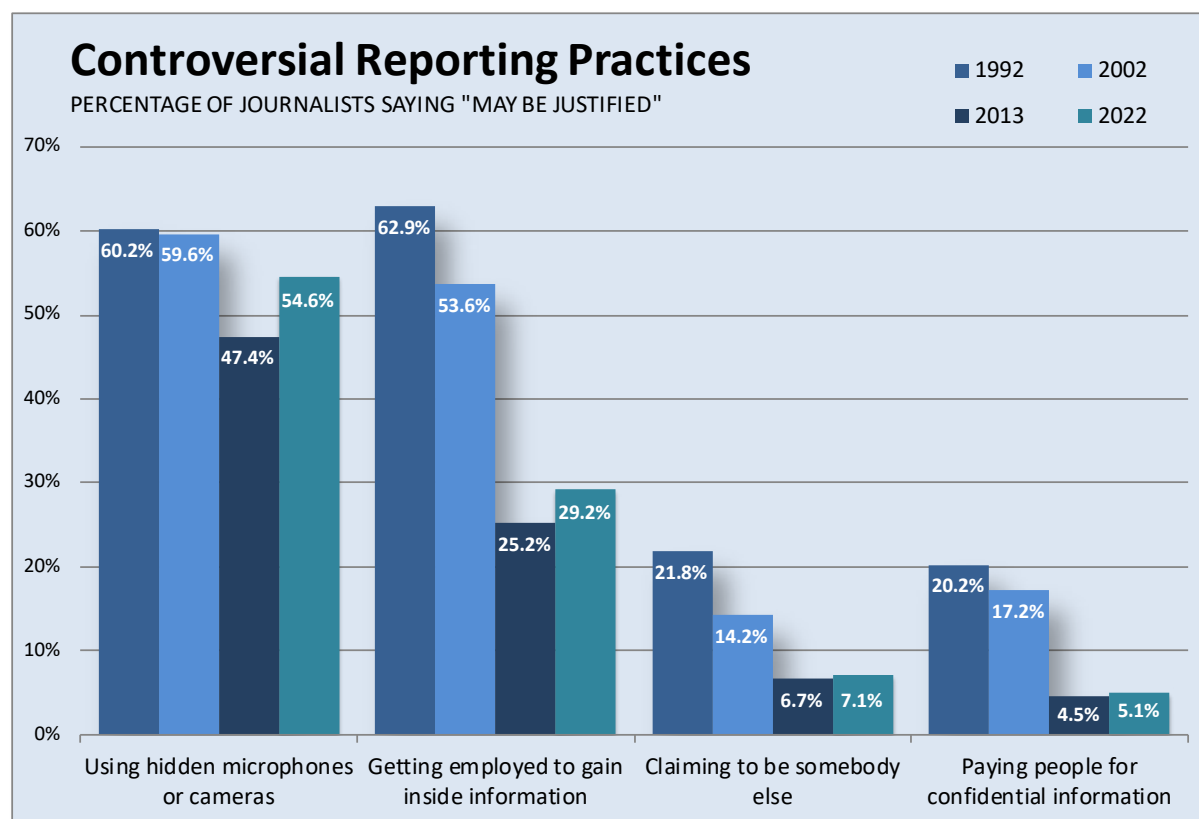
## Mixed Support For Other Controversial Reporting Techniques

An increase in levels of support was found for two other controversial reporting techniques as well, but the levels of support are still considerably less than the high-water marks in 1992. The occasional use of “hidden cameras or microphones,” for example, was supported by 54.6 percent of journalists in 2022, but only 47.4 percent in 2013. Similarly, support for “getting employed to gain inside information” increased slightly from 25.2 percent in 2013 to 29.2 percent in 2022.

U.S. journalists in 2022 also were slightly more likely to endorse controversial reporting techniques such

as “claiming to be somebody else” or “paying people for information,” but support for such reporting techniques remained very low, as in 2013.

Overall, the somewhat tentative and cautious increases toward justifying more “aggressive” reporting methods seem consistent with the increases in the perceived importance of investigating government claims. However, it is clear that journalists’ support for the use of controversial reporting practices has dropped dramatically during the past 30 years, suggesting more ethical sensitivity among U.S. journalists.



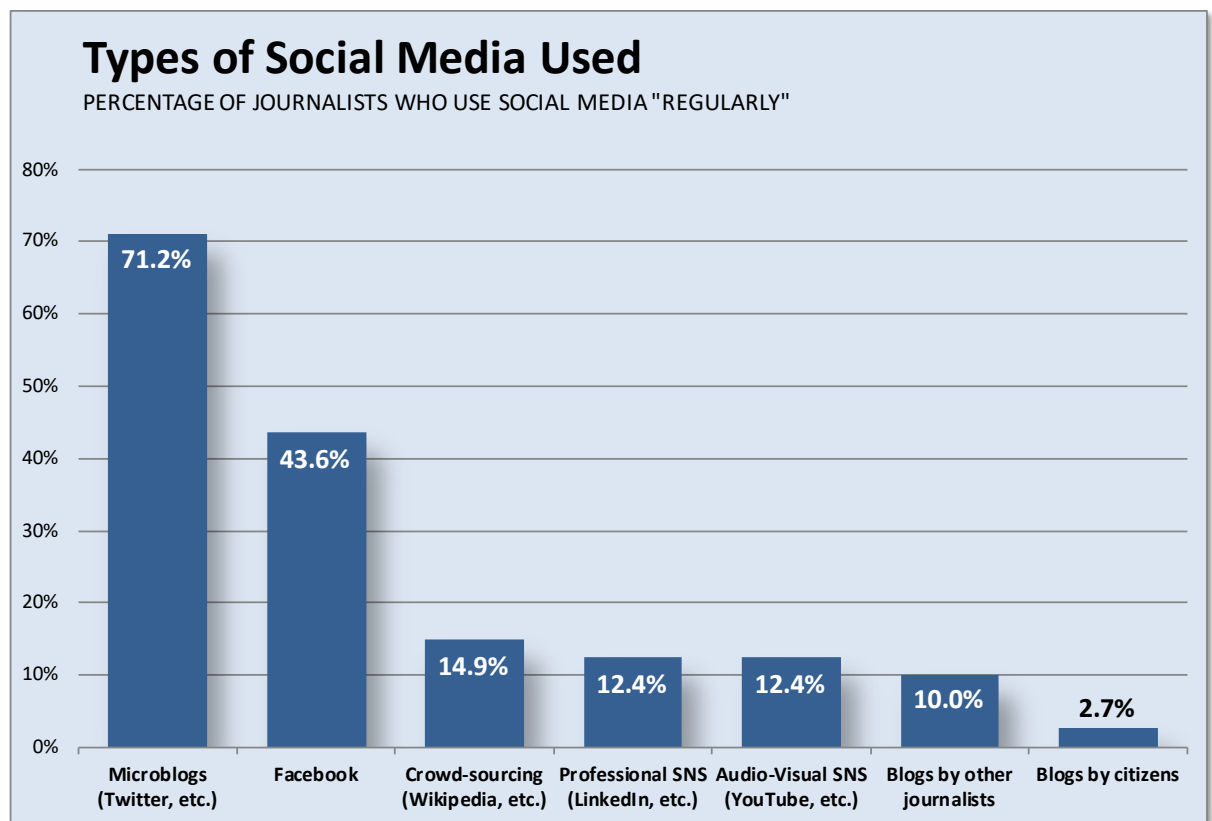
18.

# News Gathering With Social Media Now Routine

Social media use in newsrooms has become routine. It is therefore not surprising that nearly half of all U.S. journalists (49.1 percent) said in 2022 that social media are important to their work, compared with 40.3 percent who said so in 2013. The importance of these interactive media to the journalistic profession is underscored by the fact that the majority (59.3 percent) of journalists spent more than one hour per day on social

networking sites for work-related tasks.

Overall, our survey findings indicate that more than seven in 10 U.S. journalists (71.2 percent) in 2022 regularly used microblogs such as Twitter for gathering information and reporting their stories. More than four in 10 U.S. journalists (43.6 percent) also regularly used Facebook for news gathering. Other types of social media were used much less regularly.

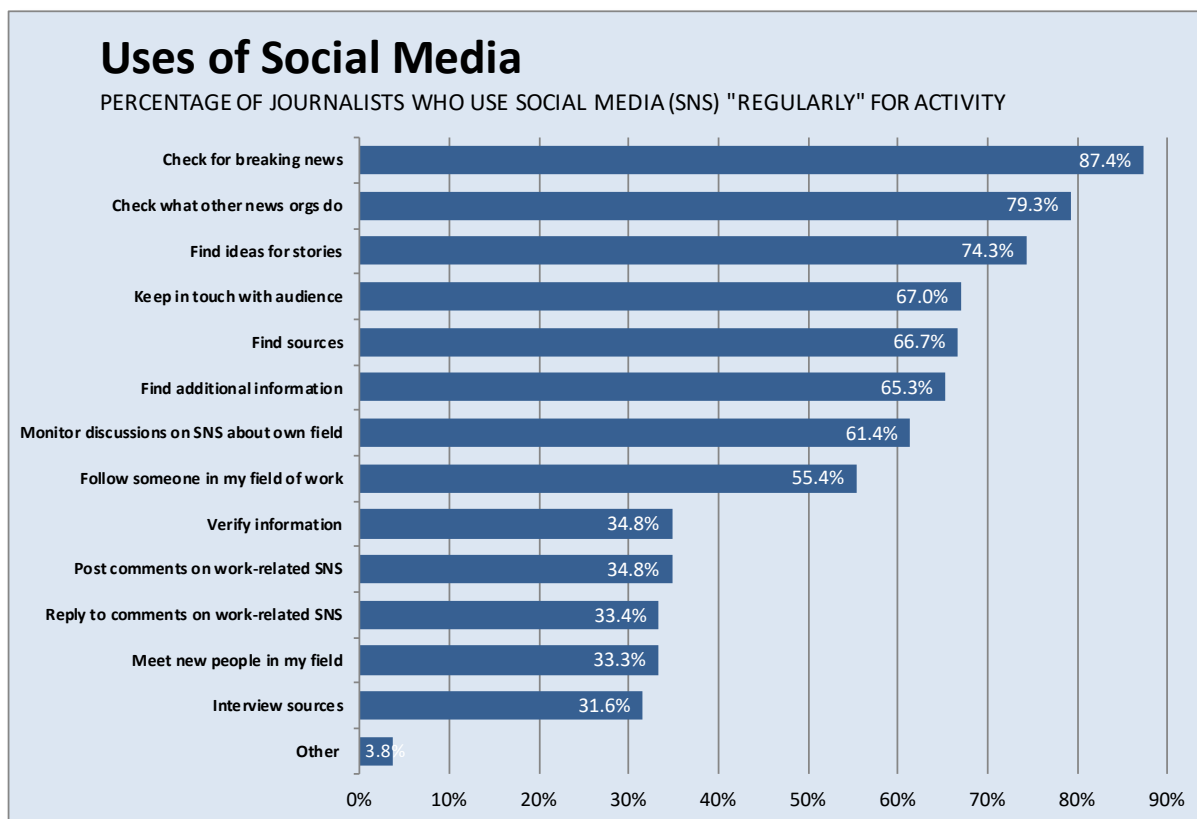


# 19.

## Use Of Social Media To Stay Informed And Monitor Competition

U.S. journalists use social media in their reporting for a variety of purposes. The most common uses of these media are to check for breaking news (87.4 percent) and to see what other news organizations are doing (79.3 percent). Social media also are used by a majority (74.3 percent) of U.S. journalists to identify story ideas, considerably more than a decade ago when about 60 percent used them for stories.

Other uses of social media in journalism have become more common as well. Interacting with audiences (67 percent), finding sources (66.7 percent), and gathering additional information for stories (65.3 percent) all are done increasingly through social media. Social media are used the least often for replying to comments (33.4 percent), meeting new people (33.3 percent), and interviewing news sources (31.6 percent).

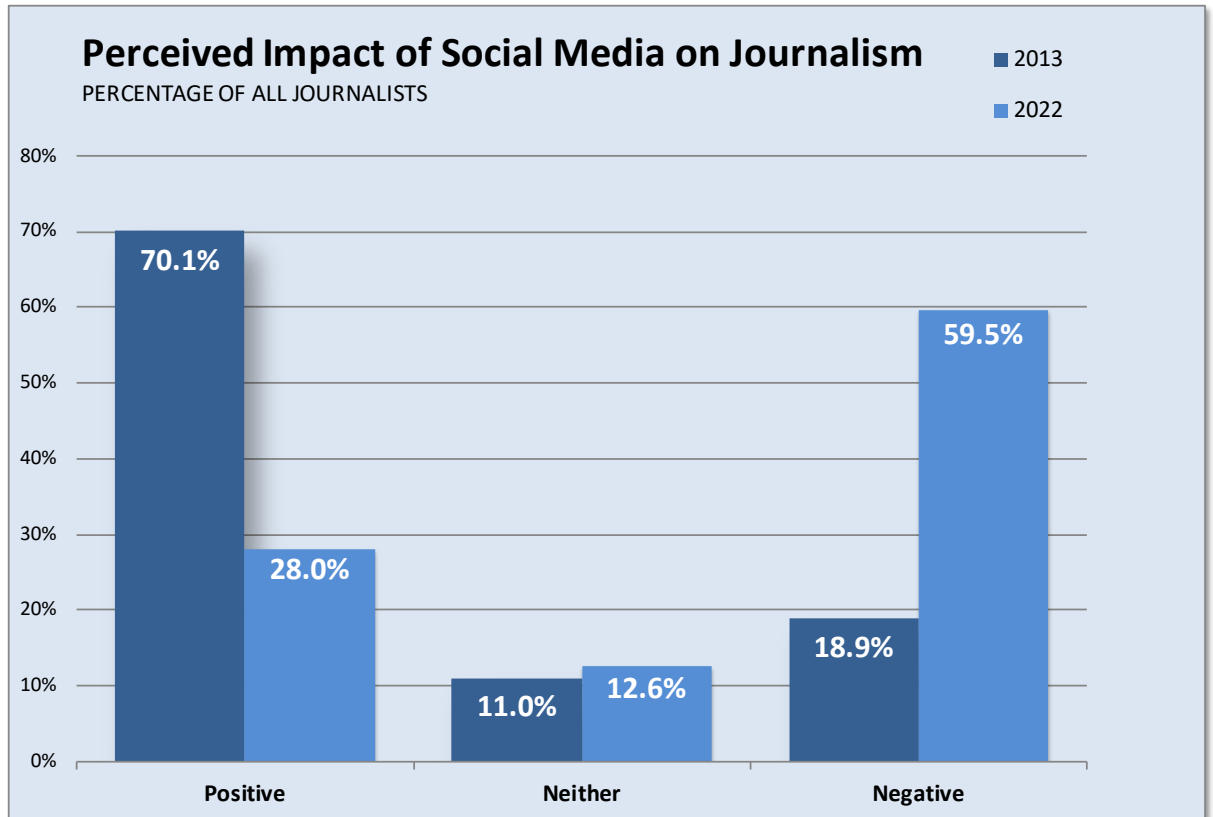


# 20.

## Impact Of Social Media On Profession

With the growing overlap between social media and mainstream news media in the 21st Century, more journalists are forced to grapple with the ways in which social media impact their professional work. Findings from the 2013 study indicated that U.S. journalists were especially concerned about the potentially negative impact of social media on the quality of journalism.

It might therefore come as no surprise that less than one-third of U.S. journalists (28 percent) thought in 2022 that social media had a positive impact on the profession, which represents a significant drop from the 70.1 percent saying that in 2013. This drop is matched by an equally dramatic increase in those who believe social media have a negative impact on the profession.



## 21.

# Majority Of Journalists Seek Additional Training

With the rise of converged newsrooms and the accelerated changes in media technology, more than half of U.S. journalists (59.5 percent) said that they would like additional training to cope with new job expectations. The largest group (27.9 percent) wanted to learn more about documents and records utilization, followed by 24.9 percent interested in data journalism, 20.6 percent willing to learn about podcast production, and 20.4 percent interested in learning media law. Other media skills in less demand included social media engagement (15.8 percent), video shooting and editing (15.4 percent), search engine optimization (14.6 percent), and web coding or design (13.8 percent).

Training in traditional journalistic practices, such as interviewing sources (13.6 percent), news writing (11.4 percent), and photojournalism (8.6 percent), were generally in less demand than some of the newer skills.

Very few journalists (8.6 percent) thought they needed extra training to expand their general knowledge, a big contrast to the earlier studies of journalists in the 1970s and 1980s, where there was more demand for continuing education in non-journalism subjects such as government, English, history, economics, and law and business. Clearly, U.S. journalists are more interested in specific job skills now than in the past.



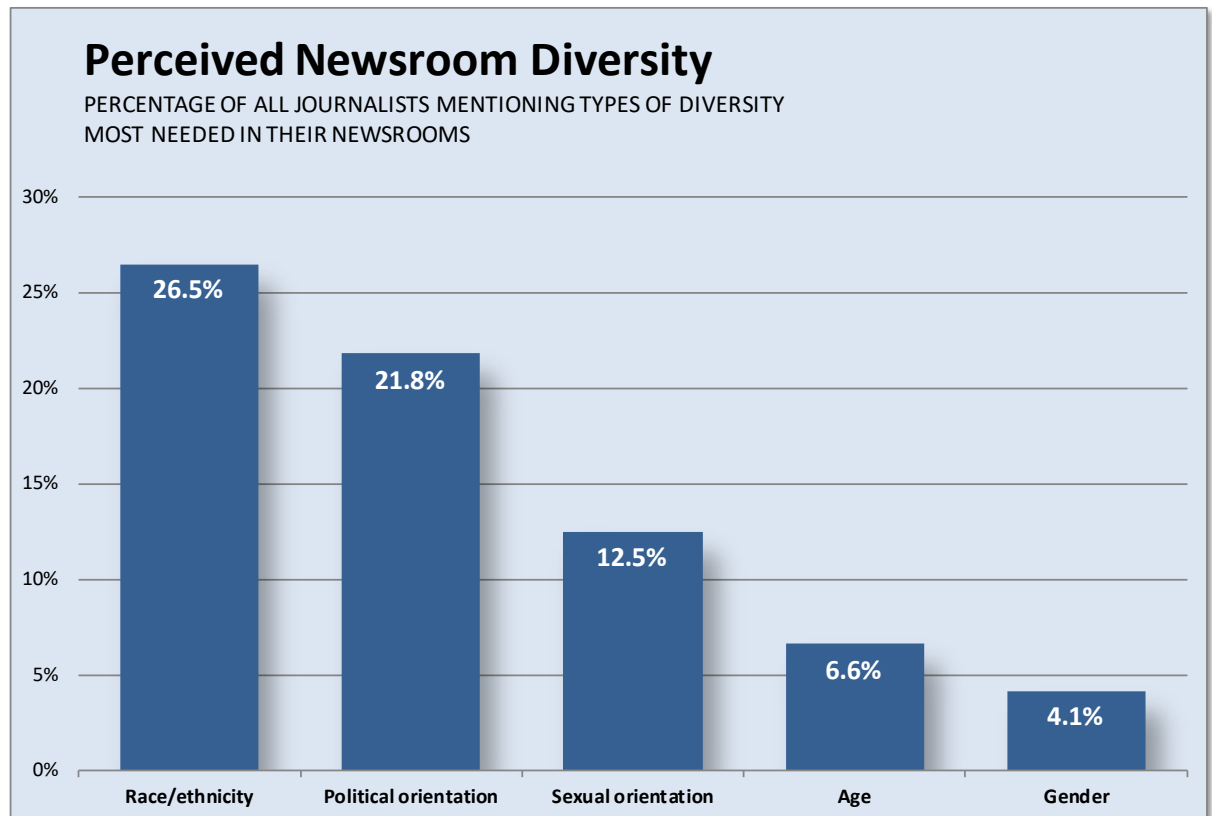


# 22.

## Perceived Newsroom Diversity

The 2022 American Journalist survey included a new question that asked journalists in which areas they thought their news organizations most needed to hire different types of reporters to increase the diversity of their reporting staffs. Overall, the largest group (26.5 percent) of respondents thought that more journalists of

color needed to be hired to increase racial and ethnic diversity in their newsrooms. A significant number also thought that more diversity was needed in terms of political (21.8 percent) and sexual orientation (12.5 percent). The fewest felt a need for more diversity in age (6.6 percent) and gender (4.1 percent) in their newsrooms.



## 23.

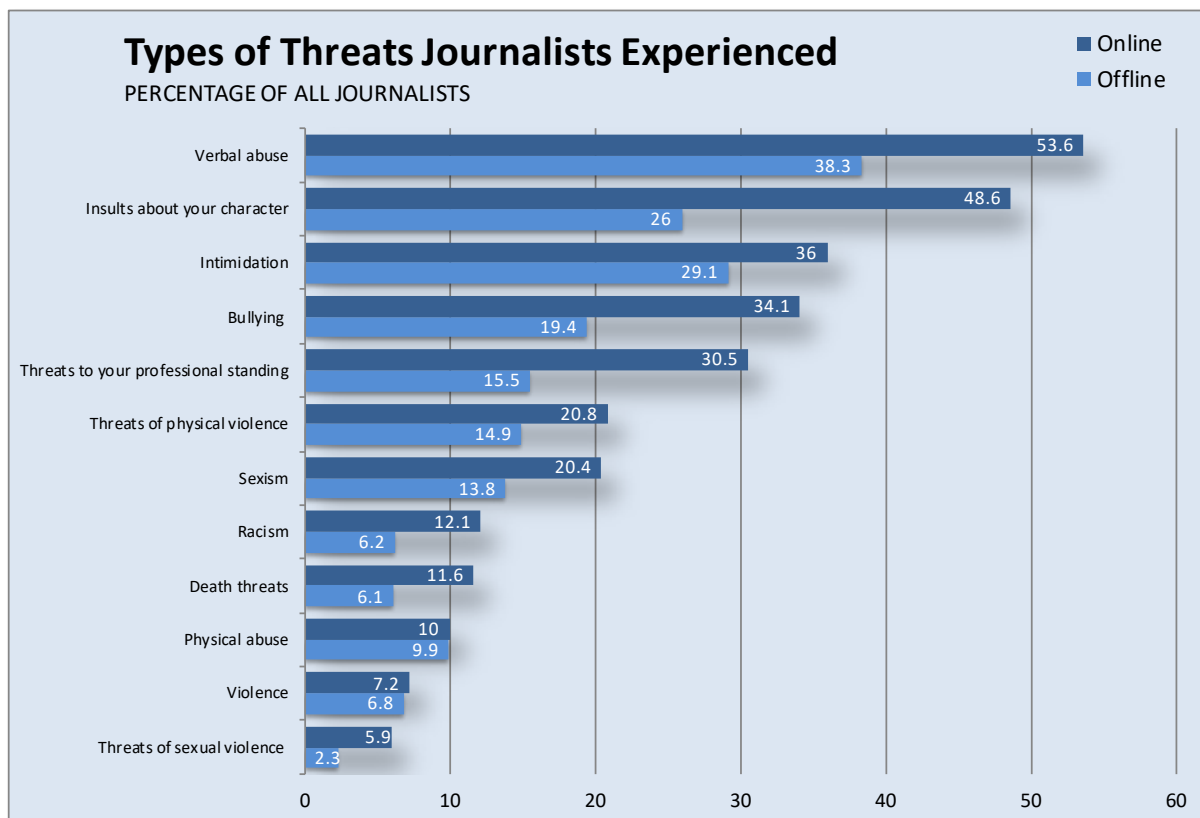
## Verbal and Physical Threats Experienced By Journalists

About six in 10 journalists (61.4 percent) report they had received some threat while on the job, ranging from verbal abuse (54 percent online, 38 percent offline), insults about their character (49 percent online, 26 percent offline), intimidation (36 percent online, 29 percent offline) to physical abuse (10 percent).

Women journalists were 7-to-14 times more likely to have experienced sexism, either online (34.9 percent vs. 4.9 percent men) or in-person (30.5 percent vs. 2.2 percent men). They were also much more likely to have encountered threats of sexual violence, both

online (12.5 percent vs. 1.3 percent men) or in-person (4.8 percent vs. 0.5 percent men). Minority journalists were found to be about six times more likely to have experienced racism than white journalists online (36.7 percent vs. 6.7 percent white) and in-person (20.6 percent vs. 3.1 percent white).

We did not ask this question in previous studies, so we cannot compare these numbers over time. It seems clear, though, that the most common types of threats to journalists such as verbal abuse or insults are more likely to occur online than offline.



## METHODOLOGY

The findings we report here come from an online survey of 1,600 U.S. journalists working for a wide variety of daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television stations, news services, news magazines, and online news media throughout the United States. These interviews were conducted from January 19 to April 10, 2022.

We first chose journalists randomly from news organizations that were also selected at random from listings in various media directories. A total of 14,700 journalists that were originally drawn into our sample were invited via email to participate in our online survey. They also received four follow-up reminders via email and one personal “nudge” call by telephone. The final sample consists of 1,600 journalists. The response rate for this representative sample of U.S. journalists was 11 percent, and the maximum sampling error at the 95 percent level of confidence is plus or minus three percentage points.

Because this study was intended to be a follow-up to five national surveys of U.S. journalists conducted between 1971 and 2013, we followed closely the definitions of a journalist and the sampling methods used by these earlier studies to be able to compare our 2022 results with those of the earlier studies.

In drawing these samples, we had to make estimates of how many full-time journalists were working in the mainstream U.S. news media. We compared our final main sample percentages with the overall workforce percentages from these estimates. The largest differences were found for journalists working for wire services and news magazines, which we oversampled because of their relatively small numbers.

The final sample of 1,600 U.S. journalists included 425 daily newspaper journalists, 175 from weekly newspapers, 536 from television stations, 104 from radio stations, 218 from online news organizations, 85 from wire services, and 57 from news magazines.

## The Authors



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