

THE AMERICAN JOURNALIST IN THE DIGITAL AGE

KEY FINDINGS



Lars Willnat & David H. Weaver

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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, and 2002 by David Weaver and his colleagues at Indiana University. Much as the U.S. Census does for the general population, these studies provide an important decennial measure of the pulse of U.S. journalism.

This present study, based on online interviews with 1,080 U.S. journalists that were conducted during the fall of 2013, updates these findings and adds new ones concerning the role of social media in journalism. Overall, the findings suggest that the past decade has had significant effects on U.S. journalists, some more negative than positive.

Compared to 2002, the updated demographic profile of U.S. journalists reveals that they are now older on average, slightly more likely to be women, slightly less likely to be racial or ethnic minorities, slightly more likely to be college graduates, more likely to call themselves Independents politically, and less likely to identify with both the Republican and Democratic political parties.

Among the more negative findings are that U.S. journalists today are less satisfied with their work, less likely to say they have complete autonomy to select stories, much more likely to say that journalism is headed in the wrong direction than in the right one, and much more likely to say that their news staffs have shrunk in the past year rather than remained the same or grown.

Other findings 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 and analyzing complex problems.

In addition, far fewer U.S. journalists in 2013 are willing to say that some reporting practices might be justified in the case of an important story. These practices include using confidential or personal documents without permission, badgering or harassing news sources, seeking undercover employment, posing as someone else, and paying for information. These seem to be indicators of a more cautious and perhaps more ethical journalism.

New findings indicate that U.S. journalists rely heavily on social media in their daily work. Most use social media to check for breaking news and to monitor what other news organizations are doing, and fewest use these interactive media for verifying information and interviewing sources. Most agree that social media promote them and their work, keep them more engaged with their audiences, and lead to faster reporting. Far fewer say that social media have decreased their workload, improved their productivity, allowed them to cover more news or enhanced their credibility.

Additional findings are available online at **AmericanJournalistSurvey.com**

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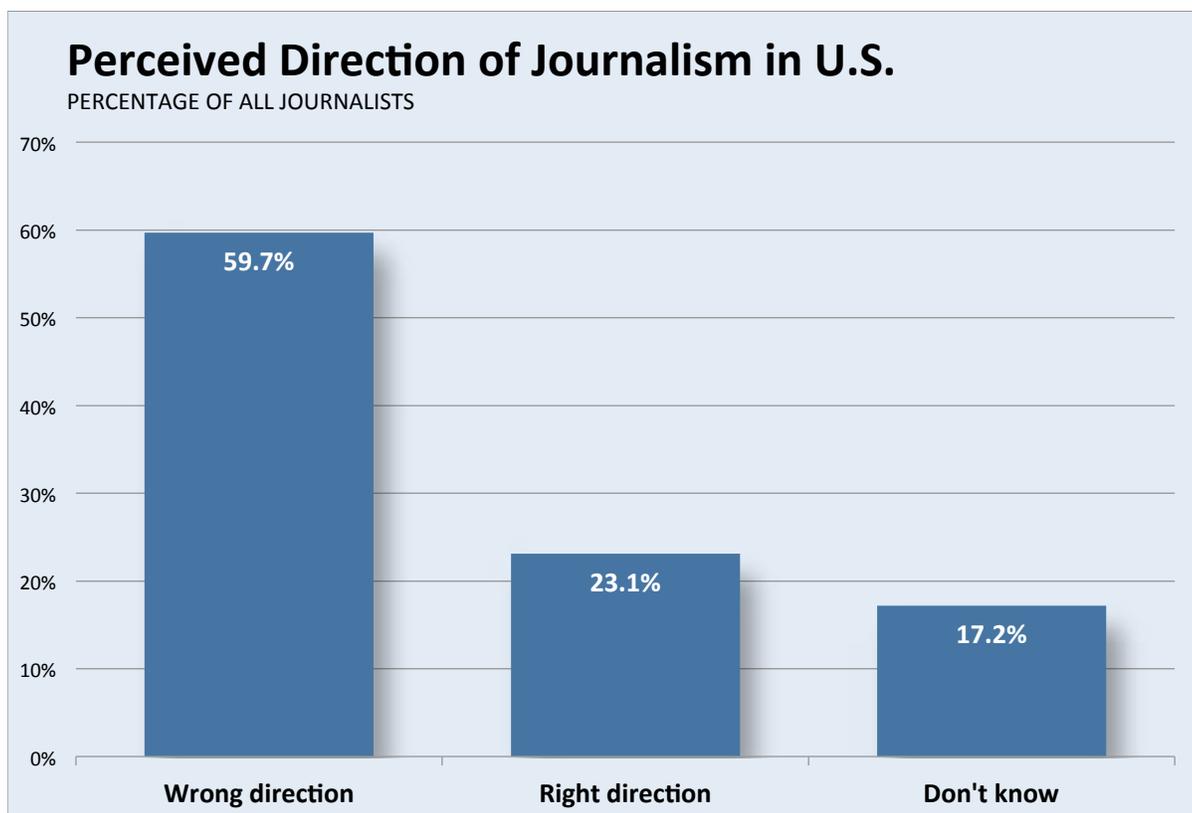
1. Most See Journalism Going In 'Wrong Direction'

Journalists in America have historically enjoyed a prominent and influential status in society as the “Fourth Estate” of government. Yet this position of esteem seems to be eroding in recent years, at least in the opinions of the journalists we surveyed.

Less than one-fourth (23.1 percent) of the respondents said that journalism in the United States was headed in the right direction, compared to more than twice that number (59.7 percent)

who saw journalism going in the wrong direction.

When asked about the “most important problem facing journalism today,” the journalists in our study mentioned the following issues most often: Declining profits (mentioned by 20.4 percent); threats to profession from online media (11.4 percent); job cuts and downsizing (11.3 percent); the need for a new business model and funding structure (10.8 percent); hasty reporting (9.9 percent).



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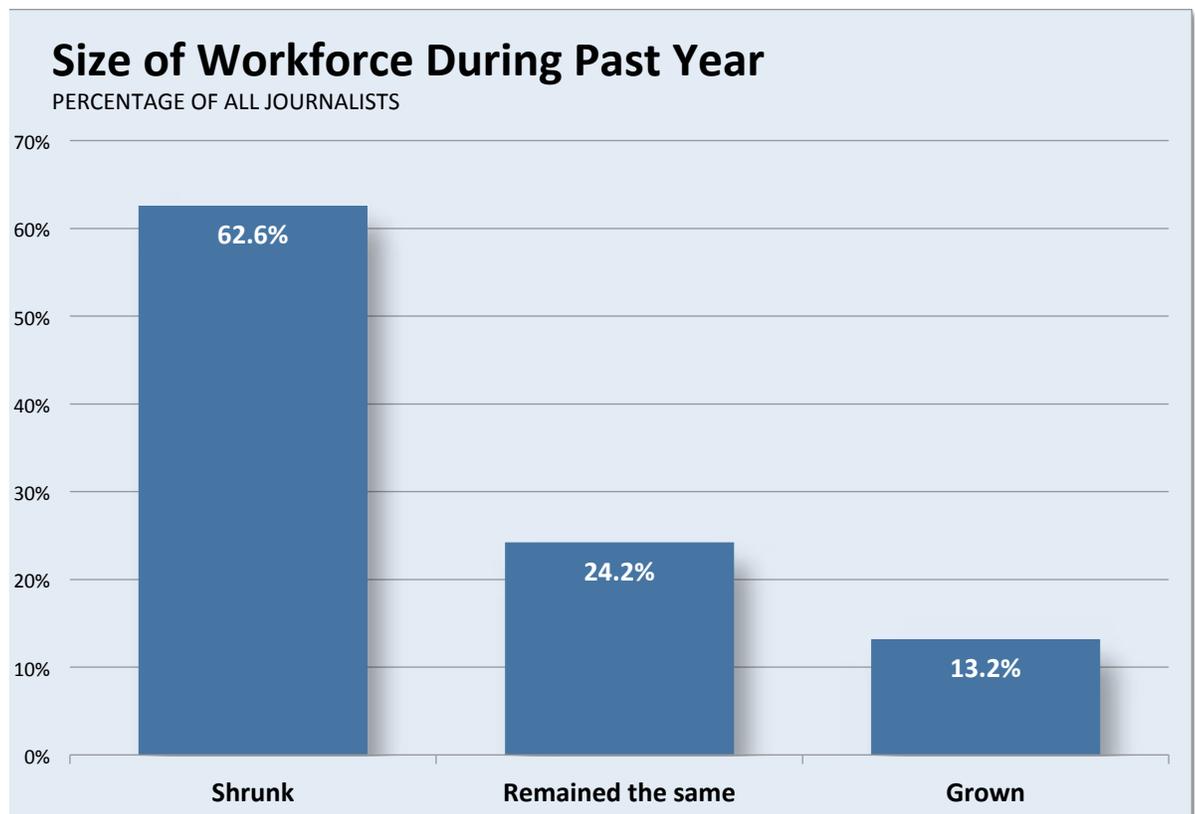
Newsrooms Are Shrinking

A clear majority of U.S. journalists (62.6 percent) report that their workforces have shrunk in the past year, while only about a quarter (24.2 percent) said that their staff numbers remained the same and even fewer reported some growth (13.2 percent).

These findings reflect the economic downsizing during the Great Recession of 2007-09 as well as the tremendous loss of advertising revenue to the Internet. According to our estimates, the full-time

editorial workforce in U.S. news media shrank by 32 percent since its peak in 1992 and now stands at about 83,000 full-time professional employees. This means that the U.S. news force today is smaller than it was in the late 1970s.

On the other hand, skilled journalists adept at working in the new media environment are currently in high demand, which likely has contributed to growth among a small number of U.S. news organizations.



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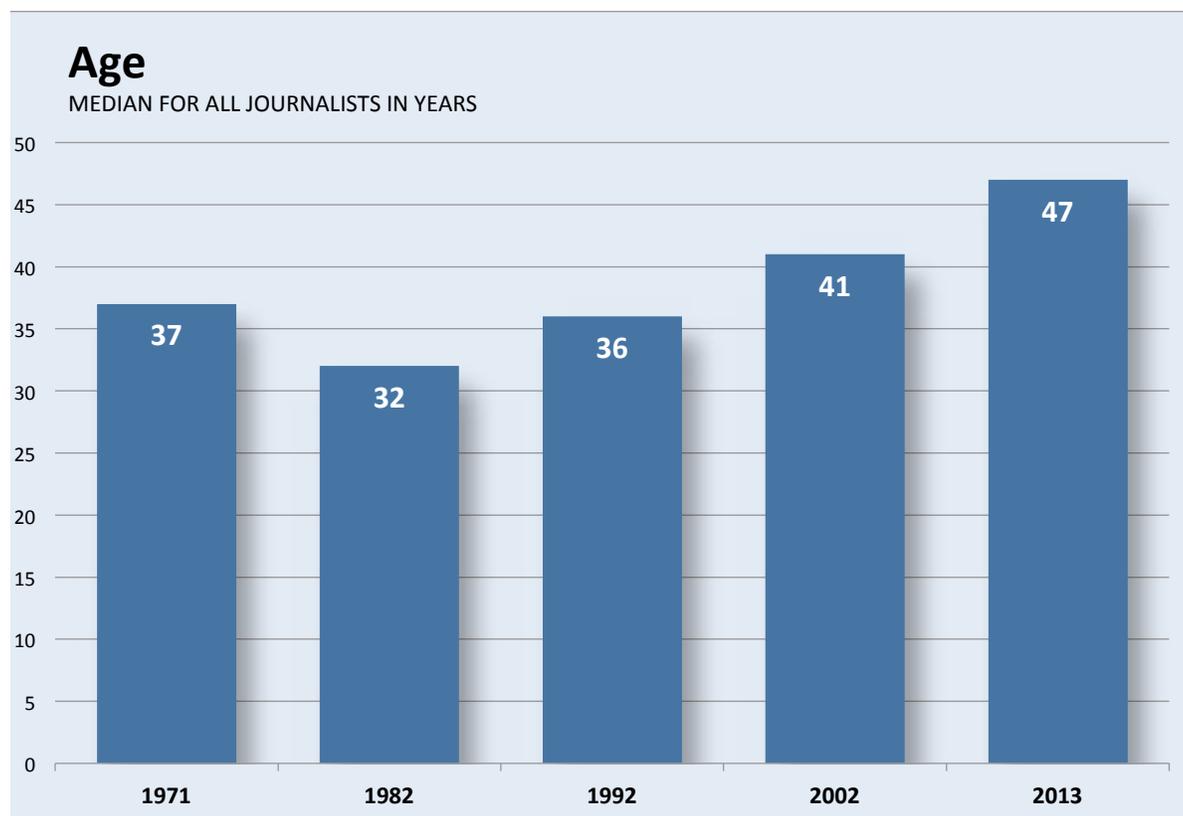
Journalists Are **Getting Older**

The median age of full-time U.S. journalists continues to increase. In 2002, the average age of journalists was 41—in 2013, it was 47. This trend applies to journalists at daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television stations, newsmagazines, wire services, and online news sites.

These findings almost certainly reflect the aging of the baby boom 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. The oldest journalists worked for wire services (median age

51 years), newsmagazines, and radio (both 50 years). Journalists working for daily newspapers (48 years) and online news media (46 years) tended to be slightly younger. The youngest journalists were found at weekly newspapers and television stations (both 43 years).

Compared to the 2012 U.S. civilian labor force, U.S. journalists in 2013 are considerably less likely to be younger than 24 years of age (4.8 percent vs. 13.7 percent), slightly less likely to be 25 to 34 (19.4 percent vs. 21.6 percent) and 35 to 44 (19.3 percent vs. 21.1 percent), significantly more likely to be 45 to 54 (29.2 percent vs. 22.6 percent) and 55 to 64 (23.2 percent vs. 15.9 percent), and about as likely to be 65 and older (4.2 percent vs. 5 percent).



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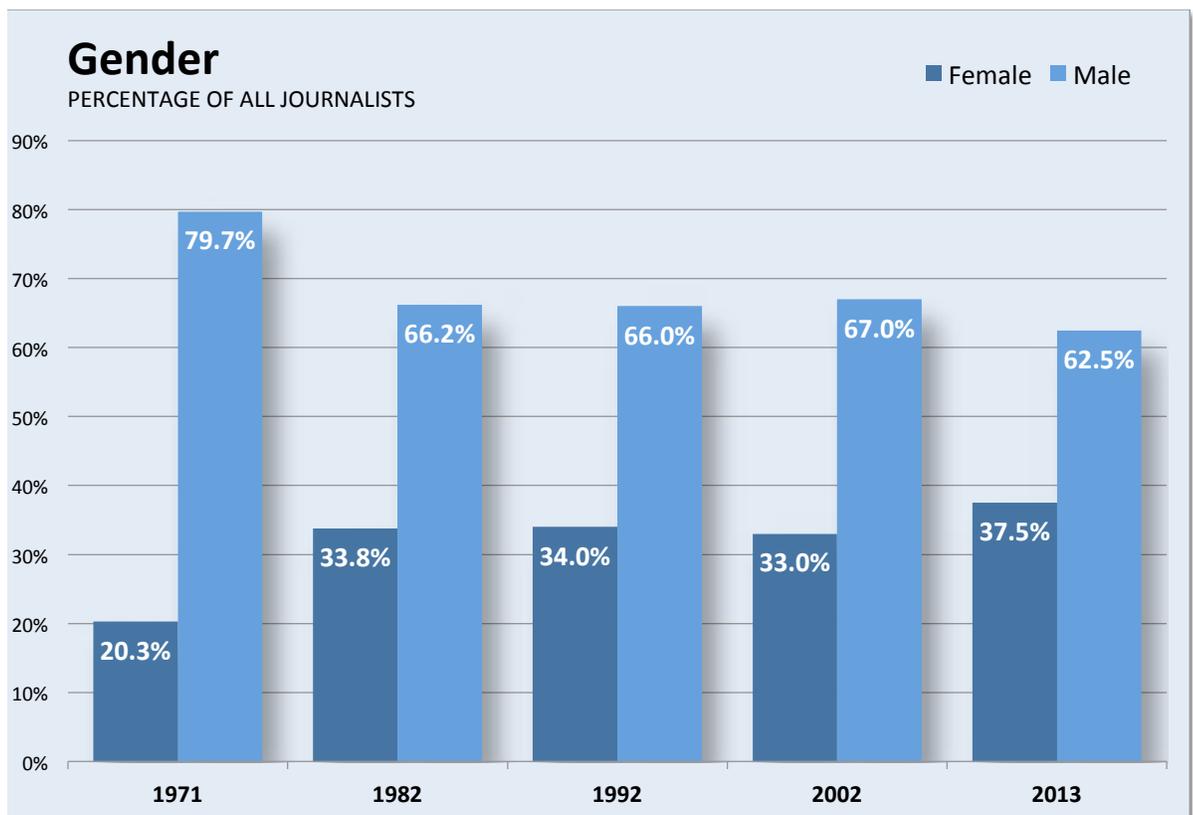
Slight Increase In The Number Of **Female Journalists**

The percentage of female U.S. journalists has increased from 33 percent in 2002 to 37.5 percent in 2013. However, women still represent only slightly more than one-third of all full-time journalists working for the U.S. news media, as has been true since the early 1980s. This trend persists despite the fact that more women than ever are graduating from journalism schools.

Among all journalists, the largest proportion of women work for television (42.4 percent) and weekly newspapers (42 percent), and the smallest for news-

magazines (33.3 percent) and online news media (31.5 percent). Women are 38.1 percent of radio journalists, 36.9 percent of wire service journalists, and 34.9 percent of daily newspaper journalists.

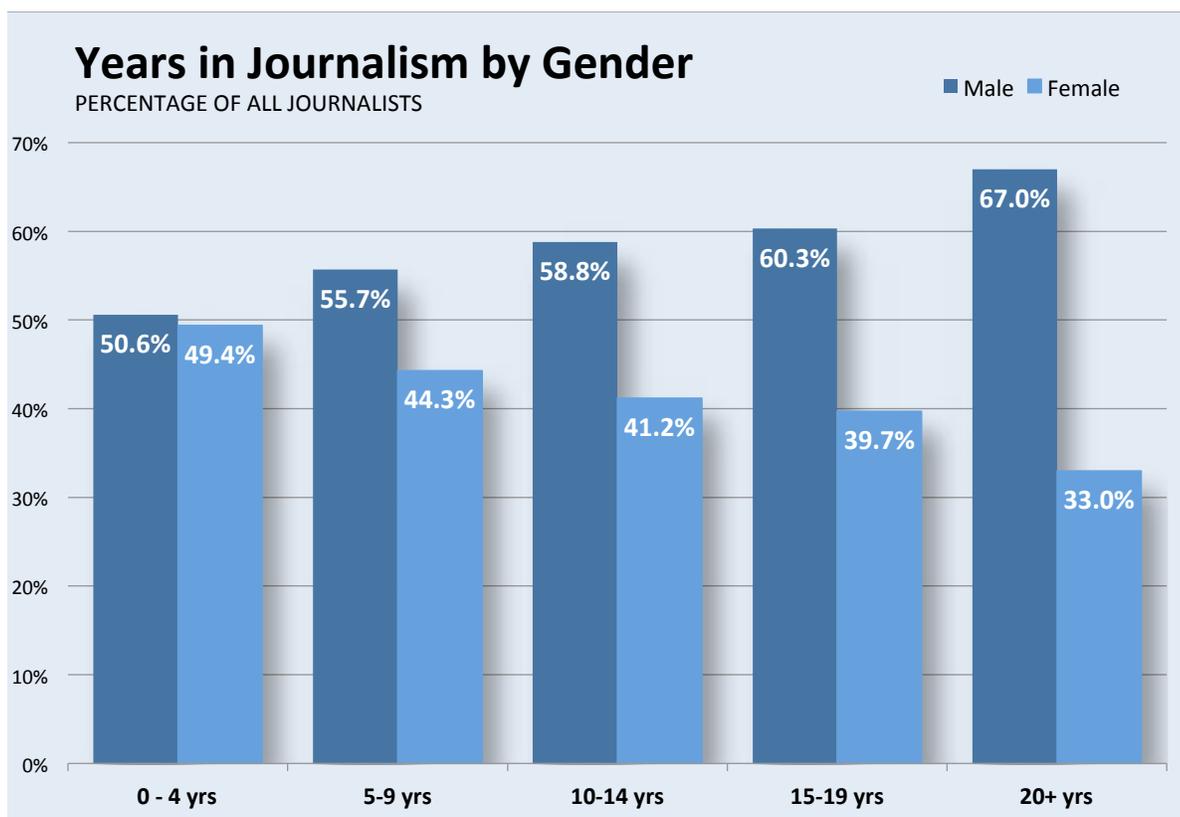
Compared to the U.S. civilian work force in 2012, U.S. journalists are considerably less likely to be women (37.5 percent vs. 46.9 percent) and even less likely than the overall U.S. managerial and professional work force, which included 51.5 percent women in 2012. Thus, retention of women in journalism is still a problem.



5. Female Journalists Tend To Leave Profession Earlier

Women are not only underrepresented in journalism, they also tend to leave the profession much earlier on average than do men. Among U.S. journalists with fewer than five years of work experience, women almost match men working in the profession with 49.4 percent. However, this relatively small gender gap grows continuously with years in journalism.

Among journalists with five to nine years of experience, only 44.3 percent are women. This percentage drops to 41.2 percent among journalists with 10 to 14 years of work experience, and 39.7 percent among journalists with 15 to 19 years of experience. The largest gap is found among journalists with 20 or more years of experience, where only a third (33 percent) are women.



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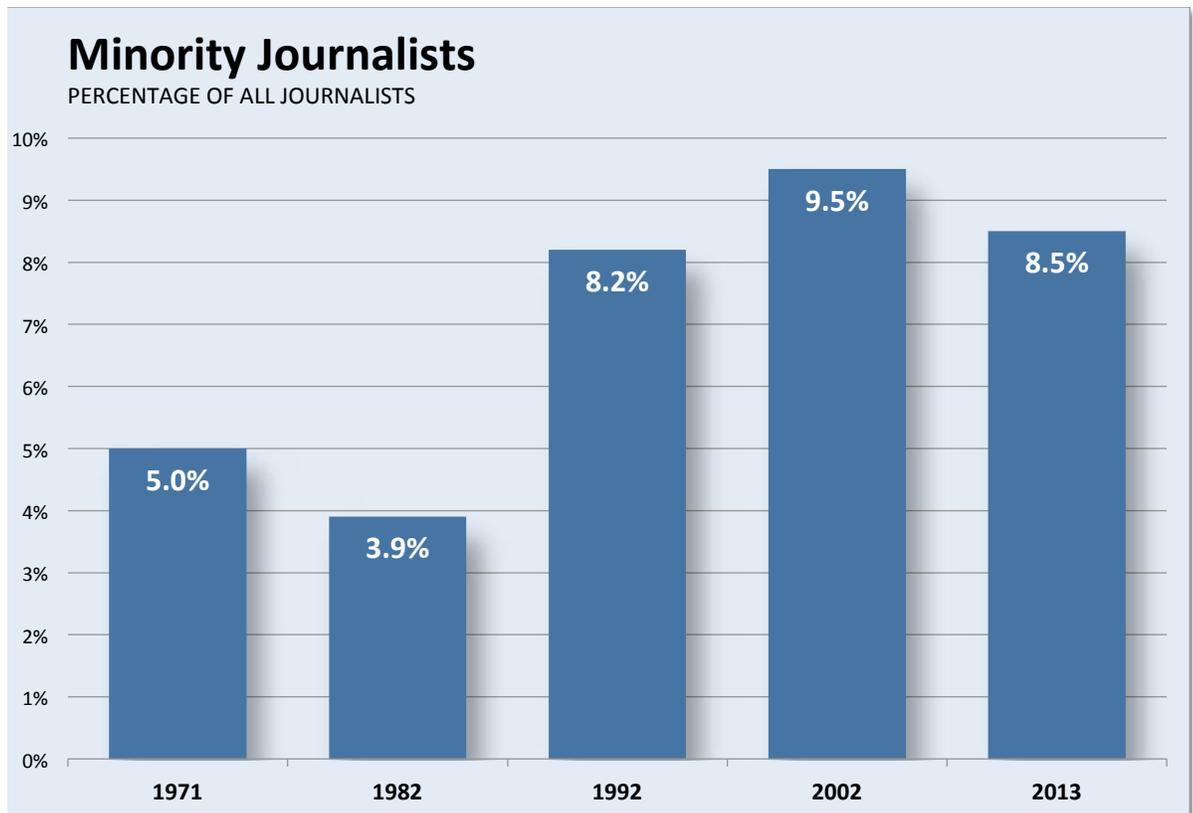
Slight Decrease In The Number Of **Minority Journalists**

The number of full-time minority journalists working for the U.S. news media has decreased slightly to 8.5 percent during the past decade. As a consequence, the total percentage of minority journalists remains well below the overall percentage of minorities in the U.S. population (36.6 percent in 2012).

However, a more appropriate comparison might be with the percentage of college degree holders who are minorities (27.9 percent according to the 2010 U.S. Census), considering that a four-year bachelor's degree is now the minimum educational requirement for journalists working in the United States.

Minority journalists in the United States are more likely to be women (50 percent) than are white journalists (36.3 percent). In addition, among all U.S. journalists with less than five years experience, 13.8 percent are minorities, suggesting that efforts to hire minorities in the past few years have been somewhat successful.

Television employs the largest percentage of minority journalists (15.4 percent) and online news organizations the lowest (4.4 percent). Radio is second with 10.3 percent, followed by wire services (8.9 percent), daily newspapers (8.5 percent), newsmagazines (6.9 percent), and weekly newspapers (5.6 percent).



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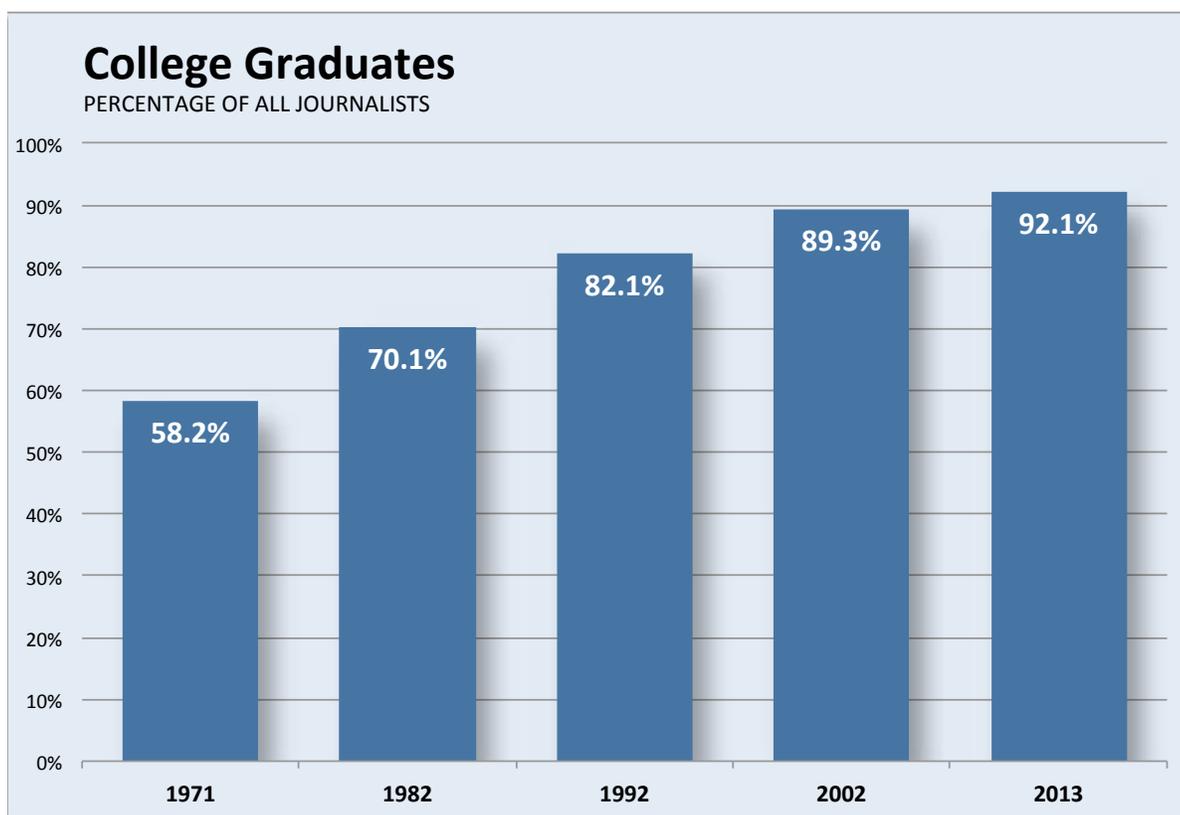
Journalists Are More Likely To Be College Graduates

The percentage of U.S. journalists with at least a college bachelor's degree continues to increase. It's clear that the four-year bachelor's degree is the main qualification necessary for being hired as a journalist in most U.S. news media. Only about 8 percent of all full-time journalists do not have at least a bachelor's degree.

Of those with a degree, 37.4 percent were journalism majors in college, a slight increase from 36.2 percent in 2002, but still below the 39.4 percent in 1992 and the 39.8 percent in 1982. When those who majored in radio-TV, telecommunication, mass communication or communication are added, the percentage increases

significantly to 51.8 percent, slightly higher than what it was in 2002 (49.5 percent). In sum, about half of all U.S. journalists with college degrees have majored in journalism or communication. The largest proportion of journalism majors is found in television (45.3 percent), followed by daily newspapers (41.4 percent), weekly newspapers (39.8 percent), online news organizations (39.6 percent), wire services (28 percent), radio (20.8 percent), and newsmagazines (15.3 percent).

Overall, U.S. journalists in 2013 are much more likely to have earned college degrees than the adult population in the United States (31.7 percent) or the U.S. civilian labor force (34.6 percent).



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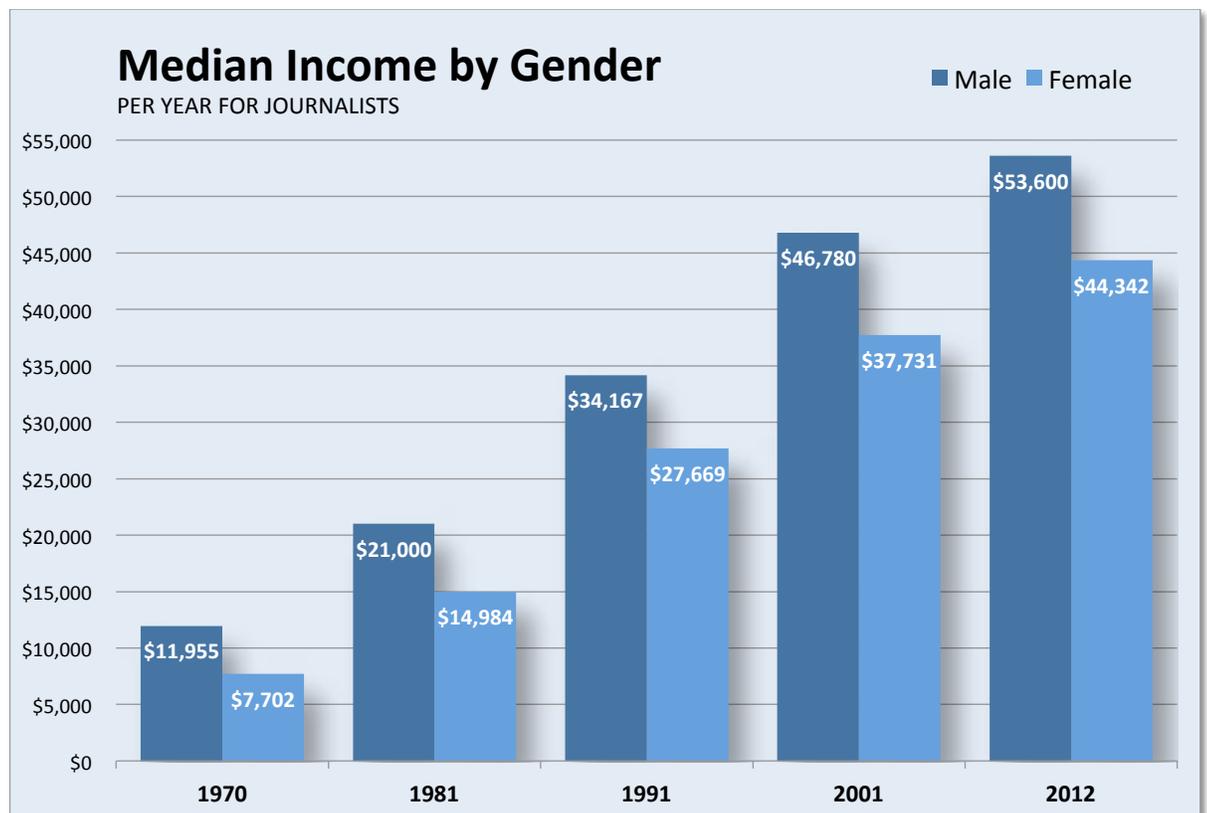
Gender Pay Gap Persists

The median salary for U.S. journalists rose to \$50,028 in 2012, an increase of less than \$7,000 over the median salary in 2001 (\$43,588). This was a 12.9 percent increase, less than half of the combined inflation rate of 29.5 percent during this decade (2001-12). During the 42 years since the first survey, journalists' salaries have increased almost five-fold (from \$11,133 in 1970), but journalists' income has lagged significantly behind inflation. In 2012, journalists would have needed to earn a median salary of about \$65,878 to have had the same buying power as in 1970, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Women journalists' median salary in 2012 was \$44,342, about 83 percent of men's median salary of \$53,600—about the same percentage as in 2001 and

1991 (81 percent), but a significant improvement over 1981 (71 percent) and 1970 (64 percent). Overall, journalists' median salary for 2012 is slightly higher than the average annual pay for the U.S. civilian labor force in 2012, which was \$45,535.

Female journalists with more than 20 years of work experience earn 6.6% less on average than their male colleagues with the same level of experience (\$72,679/\$67,885). However, for journalists with 15 to 19 years (\$53,333/\$41,944) and 10 to 14 years of experience (\$40,000/\$31,429) the income gap jumps to 21.4%. Among journalists with five to nine years of experience, the gap shrinks to 2.4% (\$31,293/\$30,555) and then reverses for those with less than five years of work experience (\$24,167/\$25,761).



9.

More Journalists Say They Are **Independents**

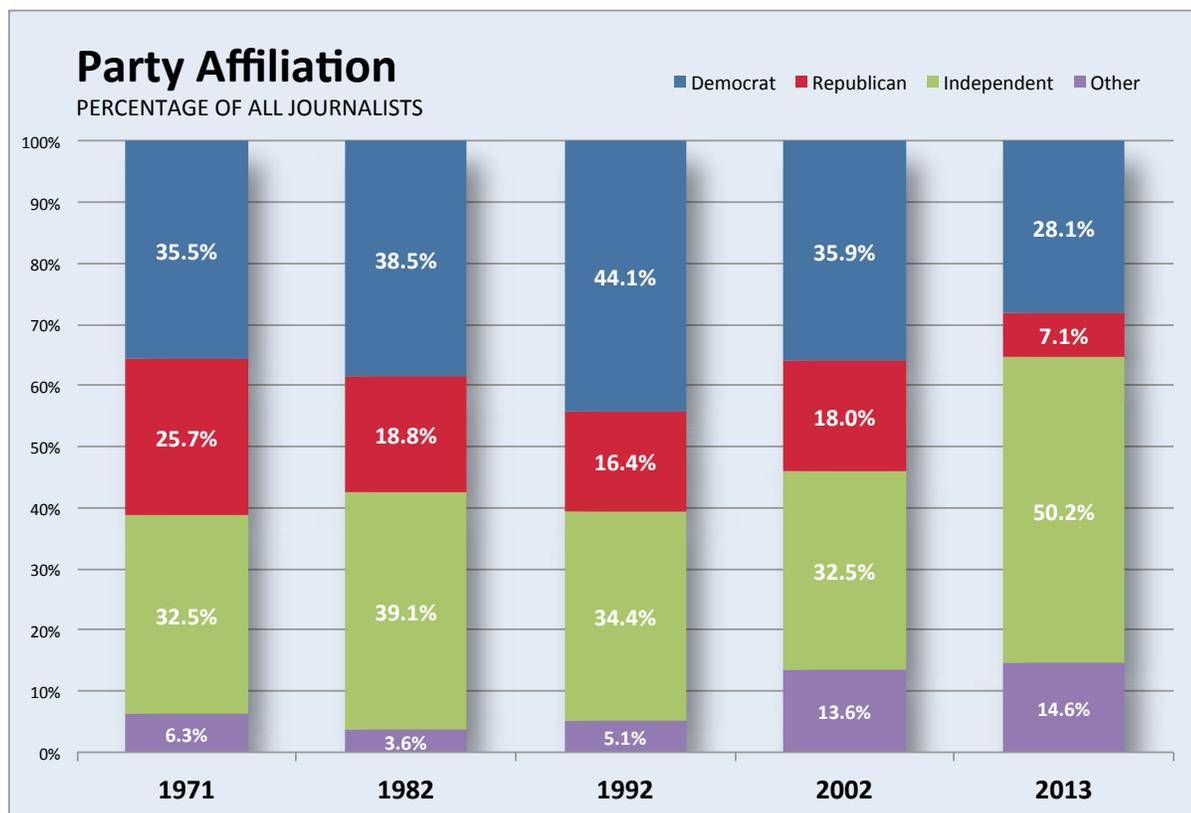
Compared with 2002, the percentage of full-time U.S. journalists who claim to be Democrats has dropped 8 percentage points in 2013 to about 28 percent, moving this figure closer to the overall population percentage of 30 percent, according to a December 12-15, 2013, ABC News/Washington Post national poll of 1,005 adults. This is the lowest percentage of journalists saying they are Democrats since 1971.

An even larger drop was observed among journalists who said they were Republicans in 2013 (7.1 percent) than in 2002 (18 percent), but the 2013 figure is still

notably lower than the percentage of U.S. adults who identified with the Republican Party (24 percent according to the poll mentioned above).

About half of all journalists (50.2 percent) said they were Independents, which is 10 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 not observed before 2002.



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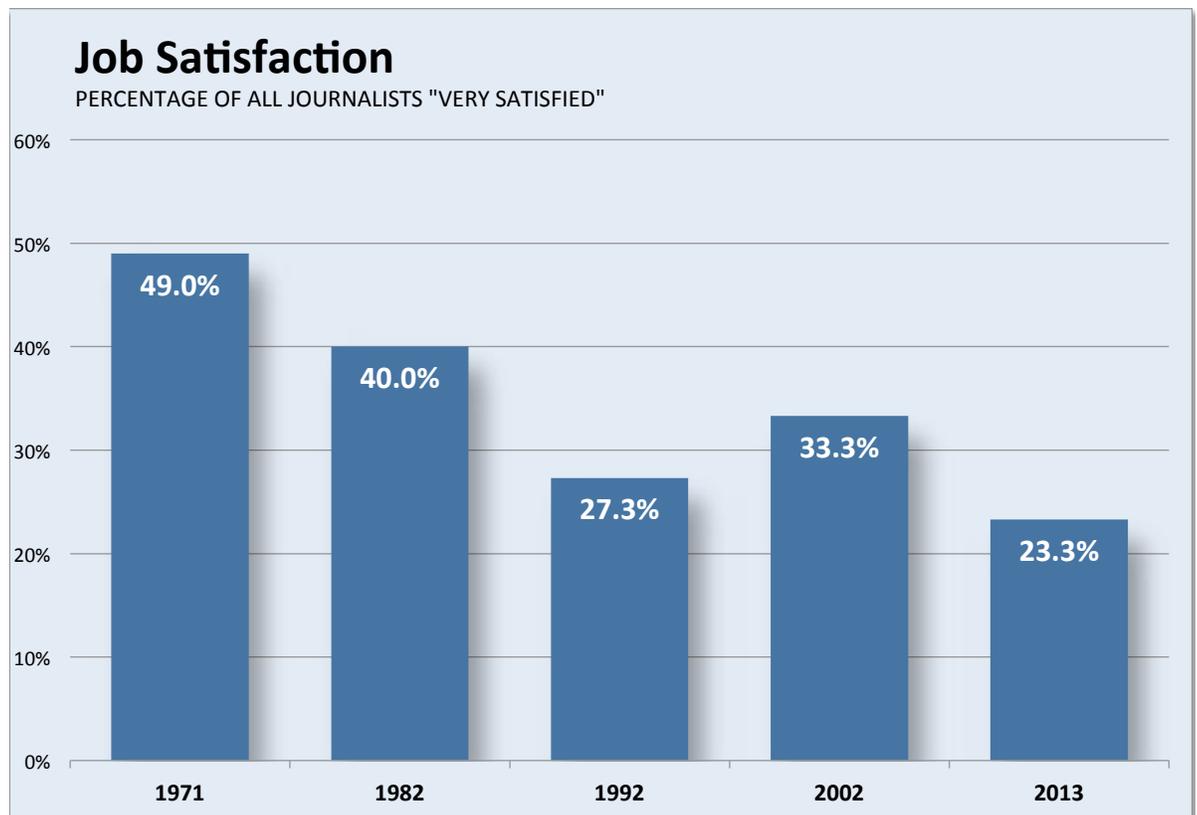
Job Satisfaction Drops Further

Articles in journalism reviews and media trade publications have lamented the decline of morale in the nation's newsrooms. Our survey findings suggest that this is indeed the case. Job satisfaction has dropped from 33.3 percent of journalists who said they were "very satisfied" with their job in 2002, to 23.3 percent who said so in 2013.

This trend continues the decline in job satisfaction that was observed between 1971 and 1992, but was interrupted with a positive bounce in 2002.

Overall, about a quarter of U.S. journalists said they were either somewhat (19.3 percent) or very (6.2 percent) dissatisfied with their jobs. This represents a significant increase from 2002 when only 16.1 percent said they were somewhat or very dissatisfied.

Women were slightly less satisfied in 2013 than were men, with 71.6 percent of women journalists saying they were either very or fairly satisfied compared with 76.3 percent of male journalists. No significant differences were found for minority journalists.



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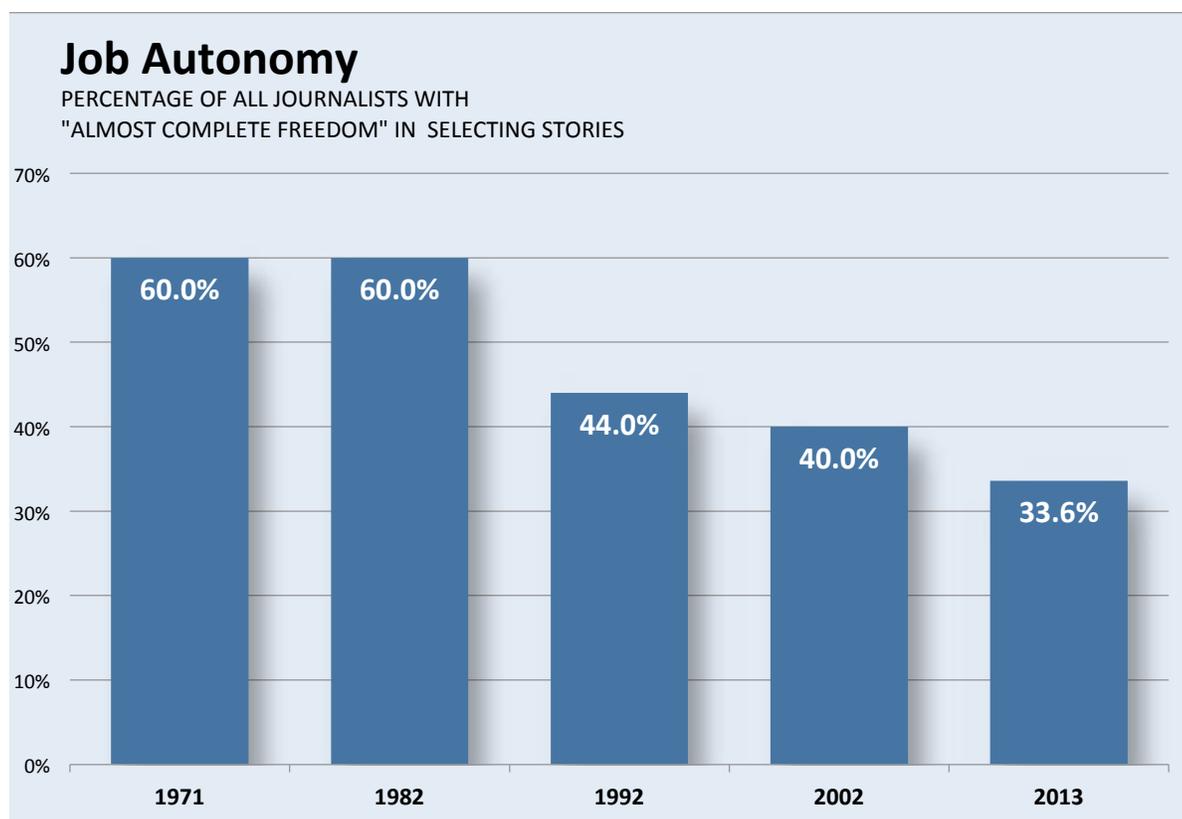
Perceived **Job Autonomy** Also Drops

Journalism has been called a “semi-profession” in part because claims to workplace autonomy have not been as firmly established as in many other professions. Even though all professions face challenges to their autonomy, the threats can be even more acute for semi-professions like journalism.

In 1971, Johnstone and his colleagues speculated that journalists’ professional autonomy could be undermined by

the fact that most journalists worked in large, hierarchical organizations.

Our surveys of U.S. journalists since 1982 document a continuing erosion of perceived professional 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.



12.

Government 'Watchdog' Role Increases

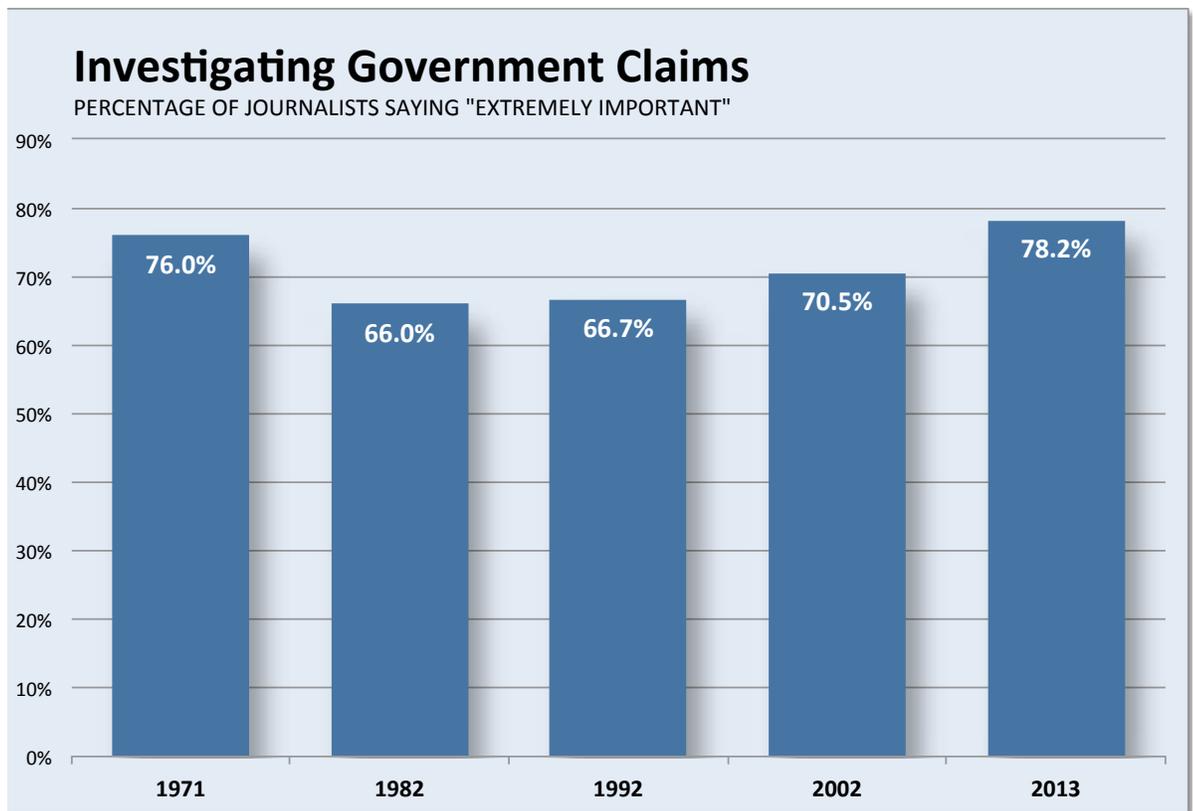
All five of the surveys conducted since 1971 included a series of questions that asked journalists about how they perceive the main functions of the news media in the United States. Responses to these questions provide a fairly detailed picture of how these role perceptions have changed during the past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

When asked about the importance of a number of things "that the news media do or try to do," slightly more

than three-quarters (78.2 percent) of U.S. journalists said that the role of "investigating government claims" is extremely important.

That percentage not only is up significantly from 2002, but also exceeds the high water mark of 76 percent in the early 1970s.

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



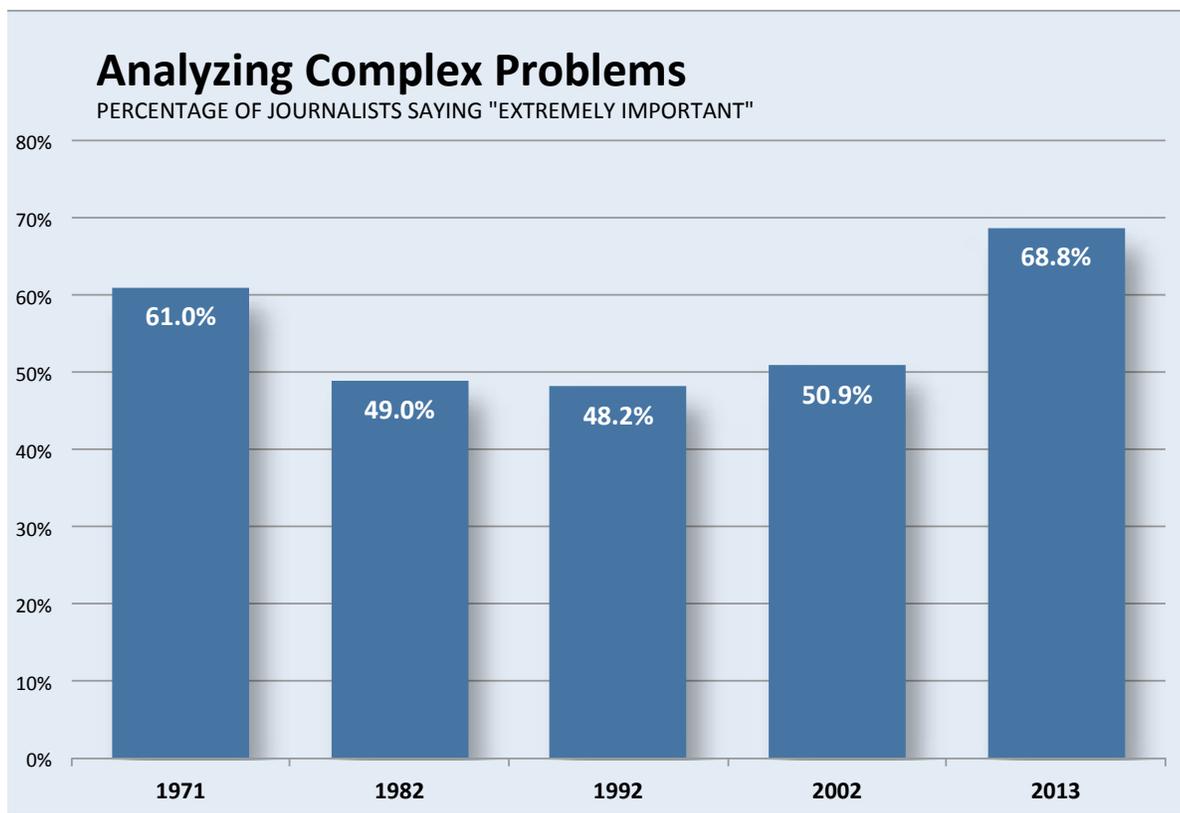
13.

More Journalists Value 'Analyzing Complex Problems'

A clear majority of journalists (68.8 percent) also said that “analyzing complex problems” in society is extremely important. That percentage is up an astonishing 18 points from 2002 and—similar to the “government watchdog” role—exceeds the high

water mark of 61 percent observed in the early 1970s.

Overall, “investigating government claims” and “analyzing complex problems” have become the most important professional roles among U.S. journalists in 2013.



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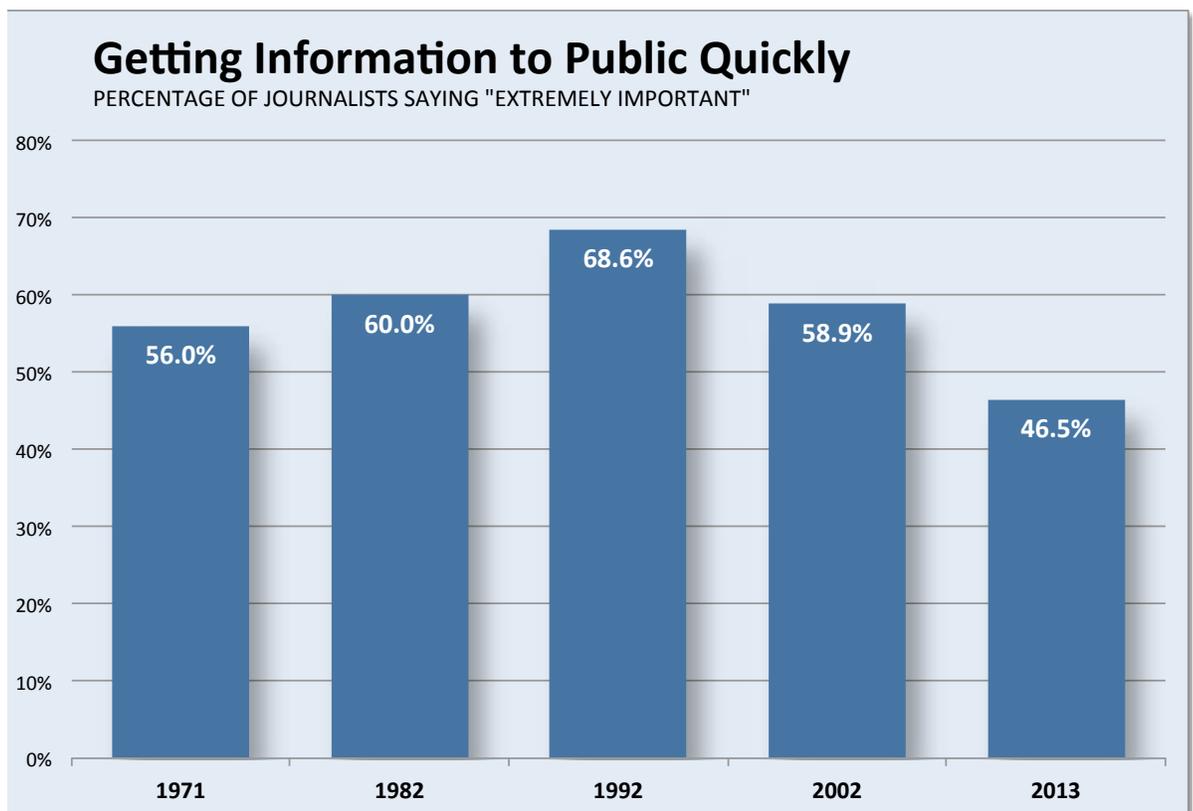
But Getting Out Information Quickly Drops

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

In 1992, 68.6 percent of U.S. journalists said it was extremely important. Twenty years later, only 46.5 percent thought this role to be extremely important, possibly because of the competition of online news that started in the 1990s.

During the same two decades, the proportion rating the role of “investigating government claims” and “analyzing complex problems” increased by about 10 and 20 percent, respectively.

Thus, U.S. journalists might have recognized that their real strengths may lie in providing investigative reports and analyses rather than quick information, especially when competing with online media that can distribute news and information instantly.



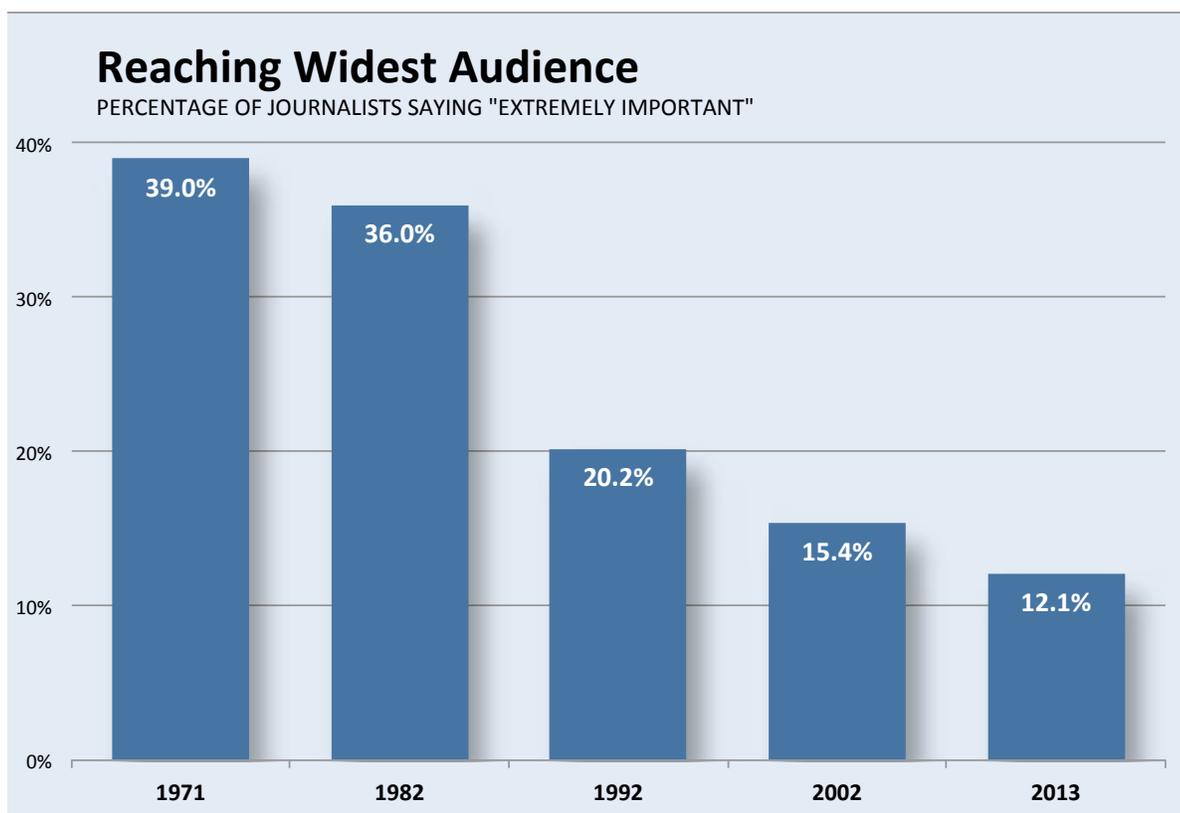
15.

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 39 percent of journalists considered that role extremely important in 1971, this percentage dropped to 12.1 percent

in 2013, the lowest ever.

This perception of a shrinking mass audience might be driven by the overall decline of the mainstream U.S. media and the explosion of online niche media that attract a growing number of young and educated news consumers in the United States.



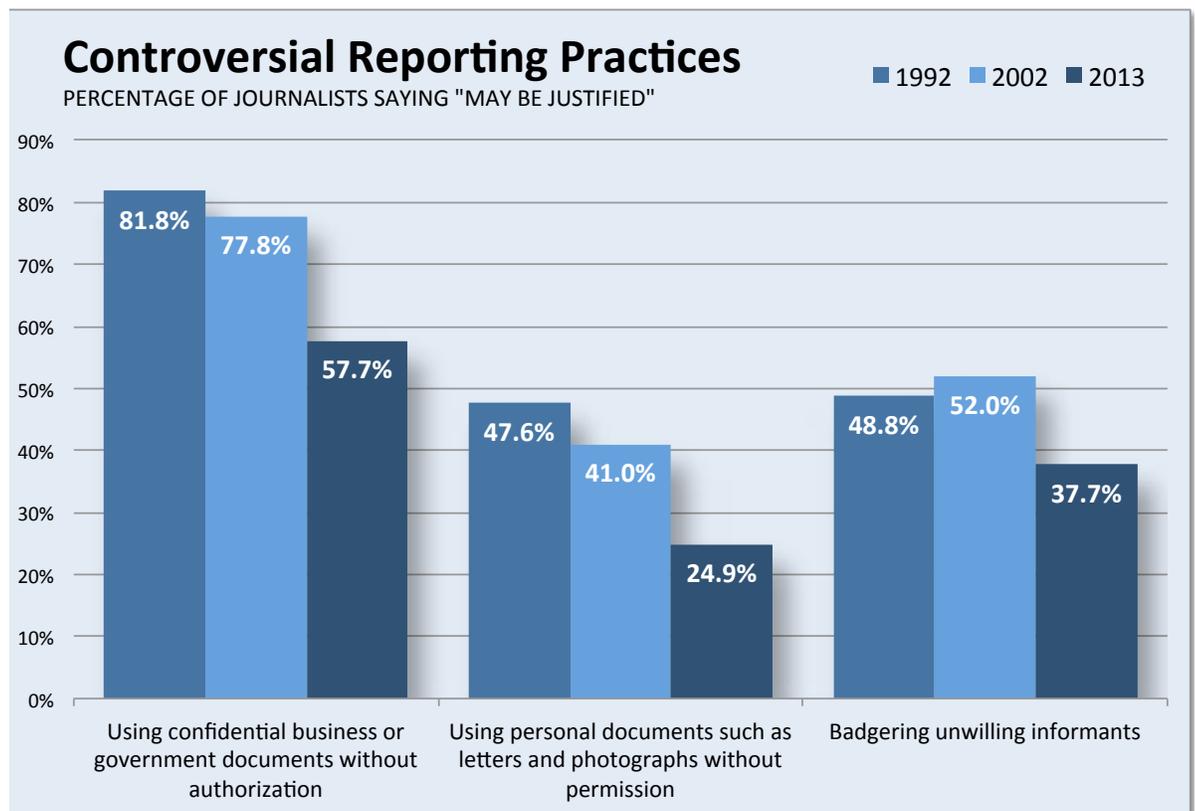
16.

Fewer Justify Use Of Documents Without Permission Or Badgering News Sources

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 2013 were notably more reluctant to endorse such practices than in 2002 or 1992.

For example, the percentage of U.S. journalists endorsing the occasional use of “confidential business

or government documents without authorization,” dropped significantly from 81.8 percent in 1992 to 57.7 percent in 2013. Similarly, the percentage of those who justify the occasional use of “personal documents without permission” decreased from 47.6 percent in 1992 to 24.9 percent in 2013. Support for the occasional “badgering or harassing of unwilling informants” also fell from 48.8 percent to 37.7 percent during the same time period.



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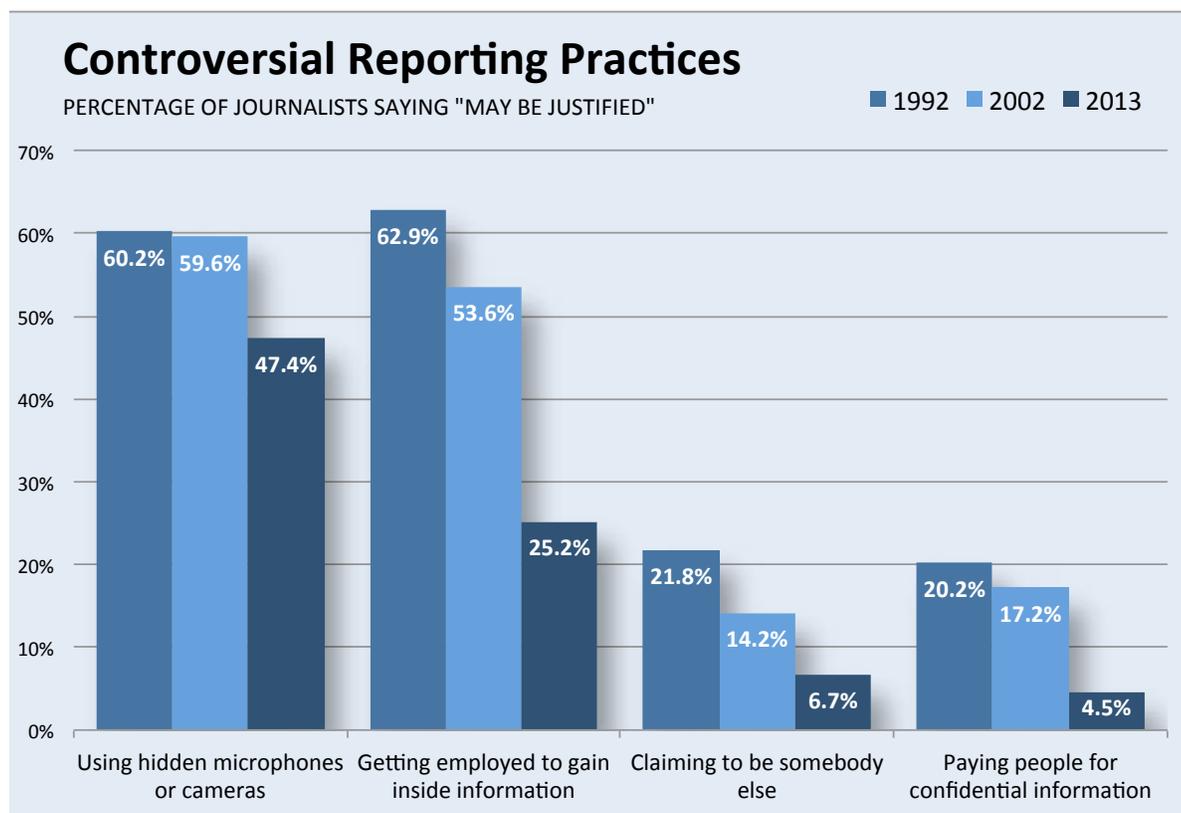
Less Support For Other Controversial Reporting Techniques

Significantly lower levels of support were found for other controversial reporting techniques as well. The occasional use of “hidden cameras or microphones,” for example, was supported by 60.2 percent of journalists in 1992, but only 47.4 percent in 2013. Similarly, support for “getting employed to gain inside information” dropped from 62.9 percent in 1992 to 25.2 percent in 2013.

U.S. journalists in 2013 also were significantly less likely to endorse controversial reporting techniques

such as “claiming to be somebody else” or “paying people for information” — despite the fact that journalists’ support for such reporting techniques already was low in 1992.

Overall, this trend toward a more “gentle” journalism in the United States might be a reflection of the growing commercial pressures the U.S. media have faced during the past two decades. Investigative reporting is a costly endeavor and might scare away audiences that do not appreciate aggressive journalism.



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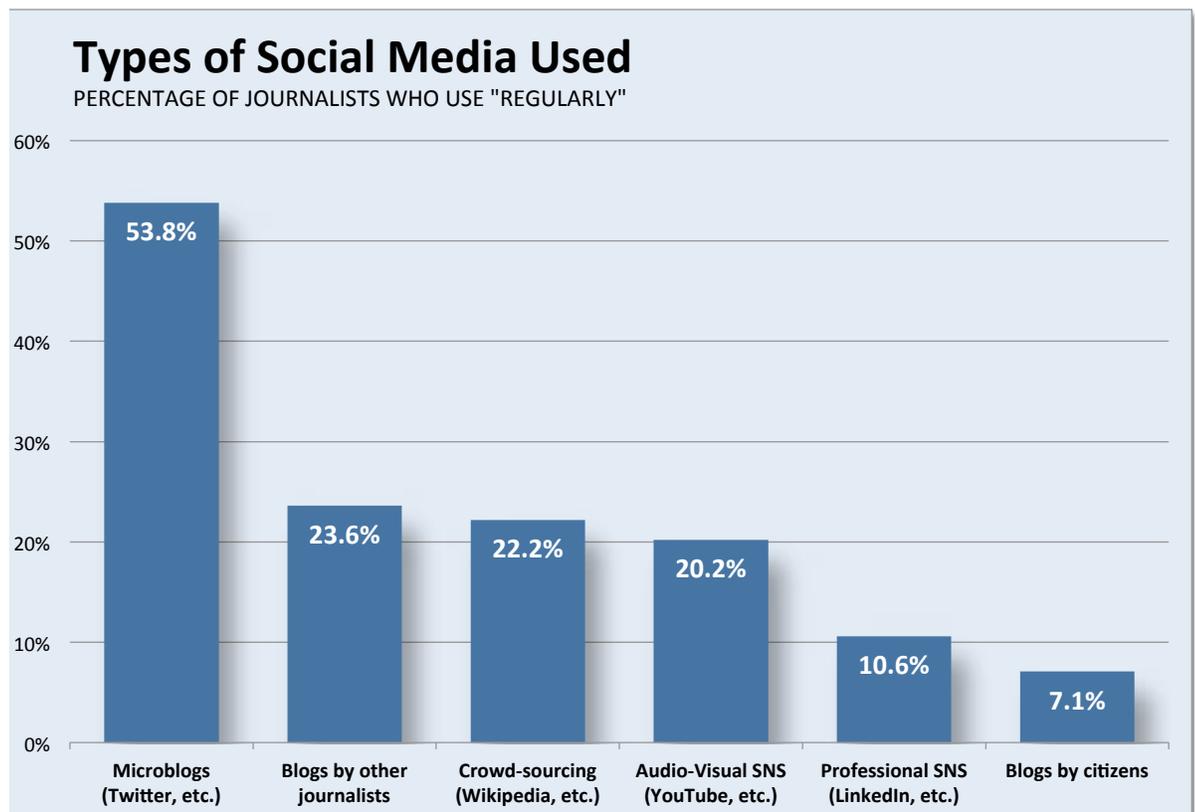
Social Media Change News Gathering

The Internet has dramatically changed the way journalists do their work. It is therefore not surprising that about 40 percent of U.S. journalists said that social media are very important to their work. The importance of these interactive media to the journalistic profession is underscored by the fact that one-third (34.6 percent) of U.S. journalists spent between 30 to 60 minutes every day on social networking sites.

Our survey findings also indicate that more than half (53.8 percent)

of all U.S. journalists regularly use microblogs such as Twitter for gathering information and reporting their stories.

Other types of social media were used much less regularly, including blogs maintained by other journalists (used by 23.6 percent), crowd-sourced sites such as Wikipedia (22.2 percent), audio-visual sites such as YouTube (20.2 percent), and professional sites such as LinkedIn (10.6 percent). Journalists were least likely to use citizen blogs in their work (7.1 percent).

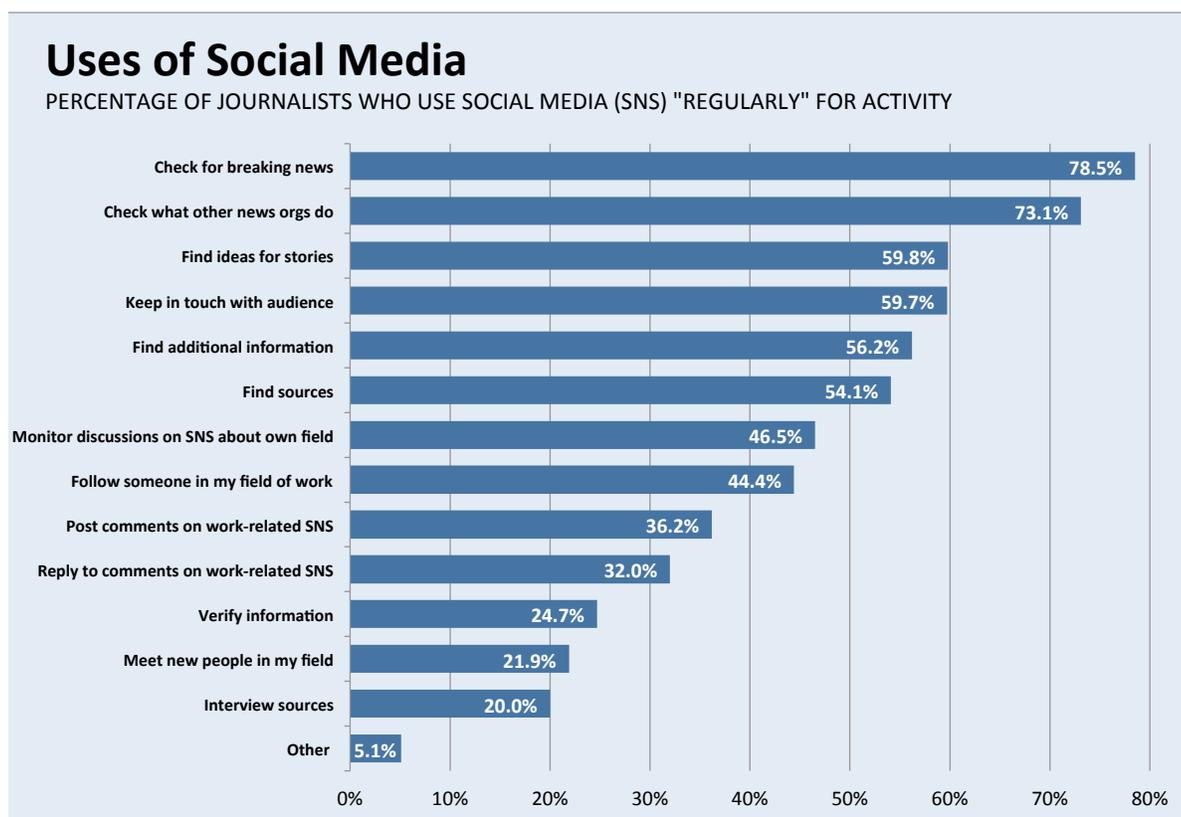


19.

Social Media Used 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 (78.5 percent) and to see what other news organizations are doing (73.1 percent). Social media also are regularly used by U.S. journalists to identify story ideas (59.8

percent), to interact with audiences (59.7 percent), to find additional information (56.2 percent) about a topic, and to find news sources (54.1 percent). Social media are least often used for verifying information (24.7 percent), meeting new people in the field (21.9 percent), or interviewing news sources (20 percent).

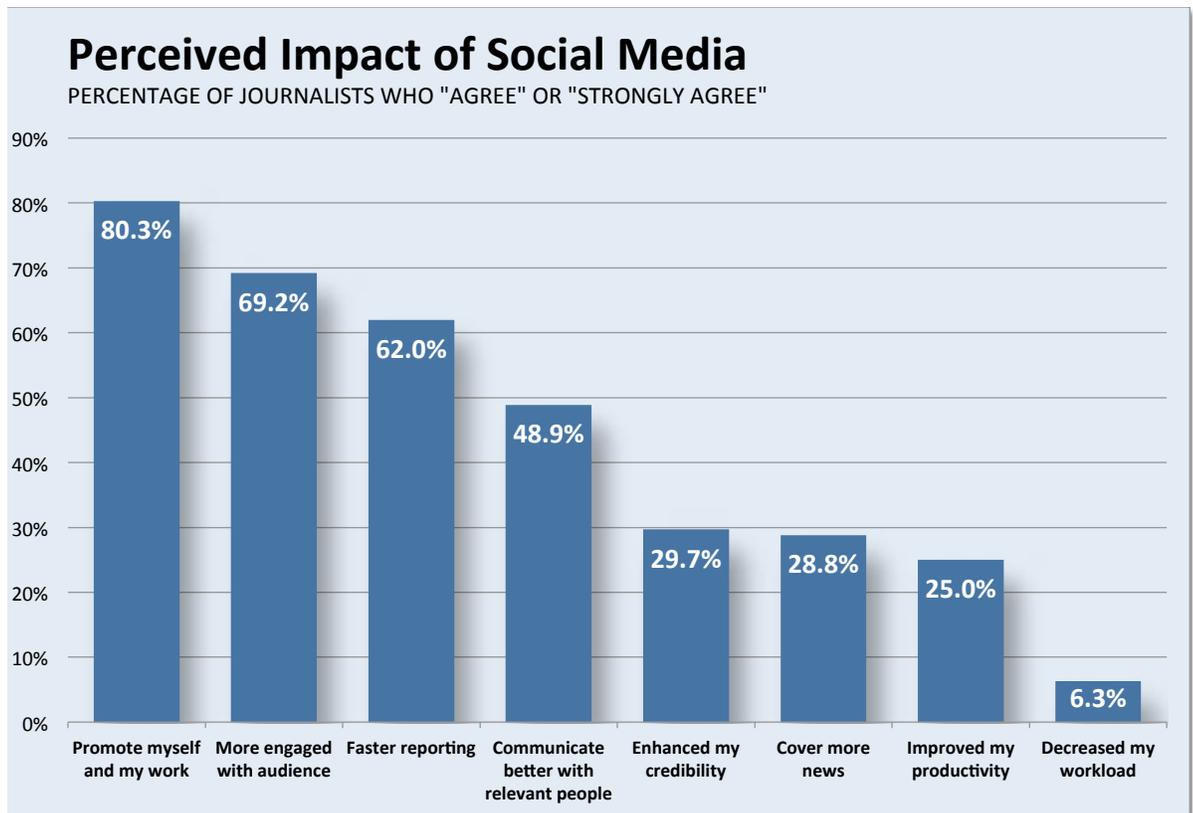


20.

Impact Of **Social Media** On Work

With an increase in overlap between social media and traditional mainstream media in the 21st century, more journalists are forced to grapple with the ways in which social media impact their work. A clear majority (80.3 percent) of journalists agreed that social media help to promote them and their work, and more than two-thirds (69.2 percent) said they are more engaged with their audiences. However, only slightly less than half (48.9 percent) agreed that social media allow them to communicate better with relevant people and only 29.7 percent said that these media enhance their professional credibility.

Thus, the use of social media as a networking and promotional tool in journalism is evident although it might not always yield desired effects. A majority also agreed that social media allow them to produce faster reporting (62 percent), but speed of news coverage does not imply that journalists can cover more news, as only 28.8 percent agreed with that impact of social media. Though the use of new media technology is often associated with increasing efficiency in the workplace, only a minority of journalists agreed that social media improve productivity (25 percent) and fewer still said that it decreased their workload (6.3 percent).



21.

Majority Of Journalists Seek Additional Training

With the rise of converged newsrooms and the accelerated changes in media technology, many U.S. journalists (68.1 percent) said that they would like additional training to cope with new job expectations. The largest group (30.5 percent) sought video shooting and editing skills, followed by 28.4 percent who wanted skills to improve social media engagement, 28.1 percent interested in data journalism, 26.9 percent wanting to learn more about documents and records utilization, and 25.6 percent interested in multimedia training. Other new media skills in less demand included real-time reporting (22.8 percent), web coding and design (19.4 percent), search engine optimization (17.6 percent), and blogging and web writing (16.8 percent).

Traditional journalistic practices such as photojournalism (18.7 percent), news writing (18.3 percent), and interviewing sources (16.6 percent) were generally in less demand than some of the newer skills.

Generally, 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.



METHODOLOGY

The findings we report here come from online interviews with 1,080 U.S. journalists working for a wide variety of daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television stations, news services and news magazines, and online news media throughout the United States. These interviews were conducted from August 7 to December 20, 2013.

The journalists were chosen randomly from news organizations that were also selected at random from listings in various media directories. All 3,500 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 response rate for the final sample of 1,080 respondents was 32.6 percent, and the maximum sampling error at the 95 percent level of confidence is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Because this study was intended to be a follow-up to the 1971, 1982, 1992, and 2002 national surveys of U.S. journalists, we followed closely the definitions of a journalist and the sampling methods used by these earlier studies to be able to compare our 2013 results directly 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 work-force percentages from these estimates. The largest differences were found for the online news organizations, the wire services of Associated Press and Reuters and for newsmagazines, which we oversampled because of their relatively small numbers.

In the end, the random sample of 1,080 included 358 daily newspaper journalists, 238 from weekly newspapers, 132 from television stations and networks, 97 from radio, 92 from online news organizations, 103 from the wire services, and 60 from newsmagazines.

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