



The Burnout Crisis in Journalism: Solutions for Today's Newsroom

A Reynolds Journalism Institute research-based set of **solutions** to prevent and mitigate burnout issues in journalism

February 2024



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Executive Summary

Burnout in journalism is widespread, multi-faceted, and influenced by various personal and organizational factors. This study from the Reynolds Journalism Institute aimed to understand the current state of US journalism related to burnout factors among newsrooms, the current perception among journalists regarding the impact of burnout in their organization and their professional capabilities, and to explore potential solutions that local newsroom leaders could implement. Over 1000 future, current, and former journalists from 50 states took this survey.

Key findings include:

SmithGeiger and RJI sought to find possible solutions that can be implemented locally within the newsroom to help ease the impact of burnout and move journalism in a more positive direction.

- Current and former industry professionals serving as journalists or in management were presented with possible areas of improvement to help limit burnout's impact within journalism.
- The top areas of opportunity seen include:
 - Work hours and flexibility options
 - Coverage and story responsibilities and workload
 - Changes in newsroom culture
- These macro-level elements, along with time off and vacation time options, new employment benefits, and management training each saw elevated levels of interest from current and former professionals.
- Within each macro-level option, specific solutions were offered with each of the following drawing high levels of interest as solutions to dealing with or limiting burnout:
 - Four-day work weeks
 - Hybrid shifts
 - More remote work
 - Input on how work is done and jobs are performed
 - Acknowledgement of the valuable work being done (#1 among former journalism professionals)

Executive Summary

Key findings include (Continued):

- The current and former journalism professionals who responded to this survey have pessimistic views about the industry.
- Across all major regions of the country, at least 44% hold pessimistic sentiments about journalism, with Southern regions leading the nation with 56% holding pessimistic views on average.
- Covering news is increasingly difficult, with 36% of all journalism professionals agreeing that covering it is much more challenging today than it was historically.
- Today's newsrooms are being negatively impacted by:
 - Having to do more with less
 - Budget cuts
 - Increasing distrust from consumers
 - Experienced professionals leaving the industry
 - Social media
- Shifting trust in journalism is impacting professionals and may be negatively influencing their psyches and possibly contributing to the risk of burnout.
- Despite these feelings, journalism professionals remain enthusiastic about the value and purpose of journalism, with 99% agreeing that journalism is essential to a functioning democracy.
- While stress and mental exhaustion heavily impact these dedicated professionals, many remain passionate about their work and feel accomplished professionally.

The most significant value of this survey and one that the Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) will focus on is further exploring the range of strategies and best practices that newsrooms can implement to prevent and mitigate, such as fostering a supportive and flexible work culture, providing adequate resources and training, recognizing and rewarding achievements, and promoting work-life balance and self-care. This RJI research offers a comprehensive and timely resource for newsroom leaders and journalists who want to address the burnout crisis and improve the quality and sustainability of journalism in the US.

Purpose

As an industry-leading resource for journalists, the [Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute](#) (RJI) at the University of Missouri School of Journalism has explored and discussed the issue of burnout in journalism for many years. These conversations and first-hand experience working with journalists of diverse backgrounds and newsrooms confirmed that burnout was an important topic that directly impacted individuals and organizations. Recognizing that resources are precious and newsrooms are facing a wide range of challenges today – the purpose of this study was to go to journalists of all types across the country to directly hear from them about the nature of burnout today and, more importantly, what they think about potential solutions to burnout that they would like to see implemented.

RJI's commitment to this critical research going forward is **focusing on supporting meaningful discussions inside newsrooms and the media organizations that they are a part of** – to explore what might be already working to prevent burnout and to encourage experimentation with and testing of new practices to address burnout that has already occurred and to mitigate future burnout risks.

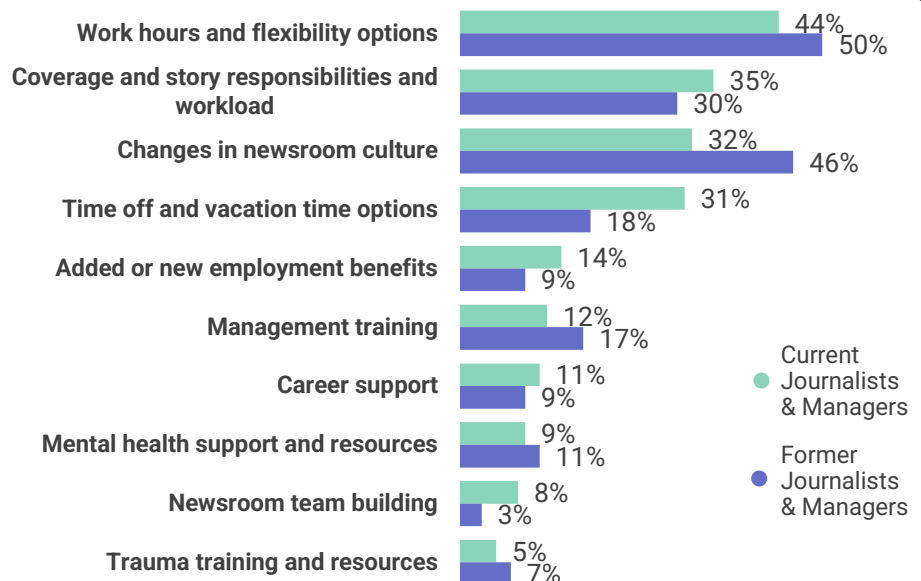
“Just talking about the burnout problem in newsrooms is helpful but we wanted to find out actionable solutions that could start moving the needle to minimize the trouble.”

– Randy Picht, RJI

While developing this survey, RJI realized that examining burnout education and resources that have been or can be offered by journalism educators could be part of the solution, so SmithGeiger worked to recruit a smaller group of journalism students and faculty to participate in a version of the study focused on what burnout related instruction was currently available and what could be offered going forward.

THE SOLUTIONS LOCAL NEWSROOMS CAN USE:

The focus on asking journalists to evaluate 10 different themes of solutions makes this study unique. The topics that received the most indications of interest are in rank order:



How The Survey Was Done

RJI conducted this comprehensive research between October and November 2023, surveying current and former journalism professionals, journalism students, and journalism educators in the United States. The survey results reflect 1140 of these participants from across the industry and all 50 states.

Outreach for the survey included RJI and University of Missouri School of Journalism email and website connections with alums and journalists in the US and outreach to many journalism schools nationwide. This direct set of appeals to participate was supported with a range of articles by RJI, social media posts, outreach to many journalism organizations, and emails to thousands of journalists from a list of practicing journalists in the United States across all industry sectors. The goal was to have diverse respondents in terms of their geography, gender, race, ethnicity, age, education, type of journalism, roles in their newsroom, and years of experience in journalism.



"Because this issue has become so widespread, everyone on the research team worked extra hard to get responses from as many newsrooms and journalists as possible so we could be sure to deliver the most useful results."

- Randy Picht, RJI

The [SmithGeiger Group](#), an international research and consulting company based in Westlake Village, California, created the survey for RJI. For more than 20 years, SmithGeiger has been a leading researcher into local and national news behaviors and consumers and has worked closely with newsrooms nationwide in print, digital, radio, TV, cable, and now streaming. A more complete list of media companies they have consulted is in the appendix of this white paper, along with additional information on the survey construction and results.



SMITH GEIGER
GROUP

Recognition Of Past Research

SmithGeiger constructed the survey after extensive research into burnout in journalism and reflects the efforts of others, which has generated a large body of work. The SmithGeiger team and RJI would like to recognize the investigations that have preceded this new survey and designed this study to build on those learnings.

RJI has also explored the issue of burnout in various past articles and support of [fellowship](#) projects, including an initial look at options for solving this [crisis](#), how to slow the exodus of women leaving [journalism](#), the use of [reflection sessions](#) to address stress and burnout, moderating newsroom [slack channels](#) to prevent burnout, changing the [newsroom culture](#), and a range of [trauma-focused reflections](#) and related [explorations](#).

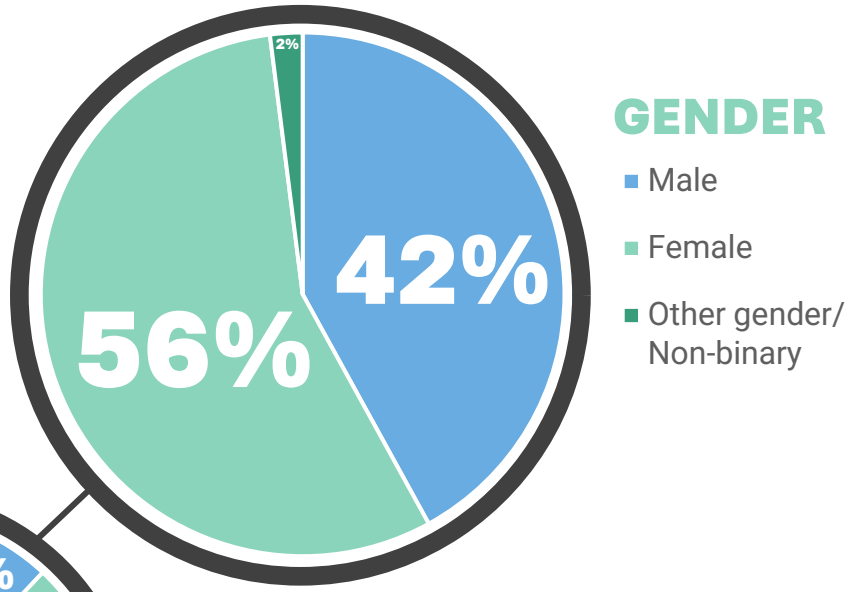
A common thread of this prior work is that burnout is a serious and widespread issue affecting the well-being, productivity, and retention of journalists and newsroom leaders worldwide. A standard definition used by researchers is one also referenced by the World Health Organization: burnout involves exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job, and reduced professional efficacy.

This review of prior journalism burnout studies encouraged our researchers to focus on how the current shifts in journalism are contributing to burnout, evaluate today's recognition of and perception of burnout impacting individuals and their newsrooms, and ask current and former journalists about potential solutions local newsroom leadership can experiment with and test.

Who Participated?

The online survey was available from **October 10 through November 27, 2023.**

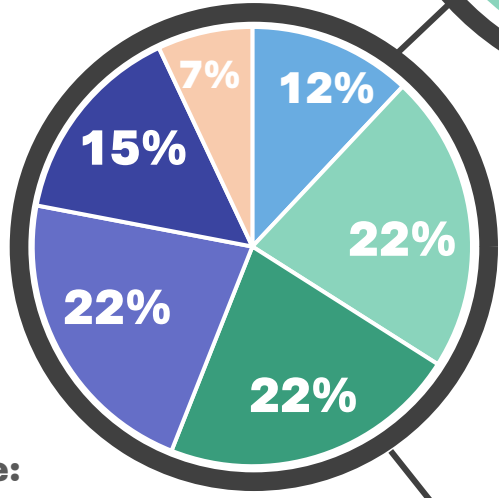
A total of **1140 participants** from across the industry and all 50 states completed the survey with segments comprised of:



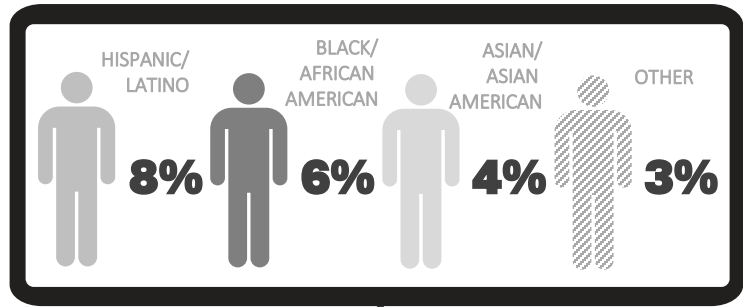
AGE

- 18 to 24: 12%
- 25 to 34: 22%
- 35 to 44: 22%
- 45 to 54: 15%
- 55 to 64: 7%
- 65+ or older: 7%

Average Age: 42 years

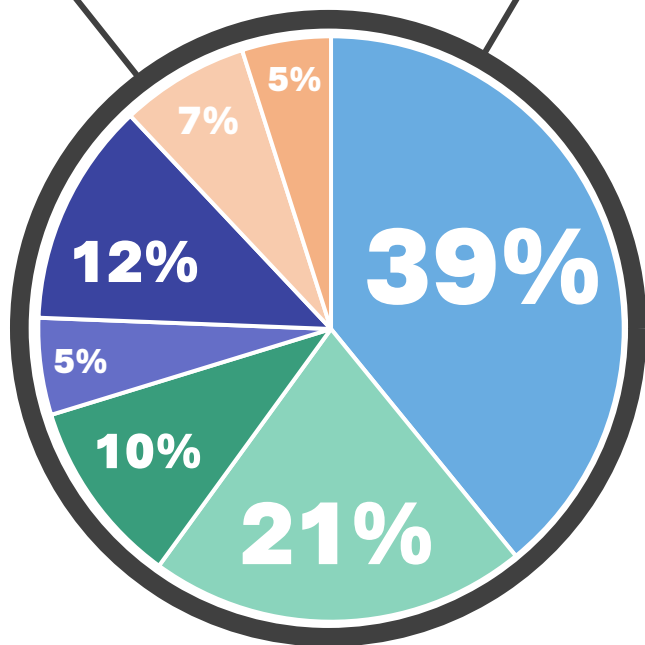


Minorities



INDUSTRY TYPES

- Current Active Journalists: 39%
- Current Active Management: 21%
- Former Journalists: 10%
- Former Management: 5%
- Other Journalism Industry professionals: 12%
- Current Journalism Students: 7%
- Current Journalism Faculty: 5%



Compensation and Staffing

While developing this study, RJI did not dismiss the industry contraction and resulting pressures on the industry's compensation and headcount. This research recognizes the realities of the industry's revenue challenges and the resulting impact on newsrooms of all sizes. The focus of this research is examining the solutions that a local newsroom leadership may be able to implement.



“Yes, there are paths to easing the conditions that lead to burnout that may be out of reach, like salary increases, but this research also shows that journalists may have some tactics to try that are definitely within reach.”

- Randy Picht, RJI

The Larger Environment

Burnout is not a new phenomenon in journalism, but it has become more acute and complex in recent years due to the industry's rapid changes and challenges. Journalists today are expected to produce more content across more platforms with fewer resources and less job security. They also face increased pressures and threats from the public, the government, and the market, as well as ethical and moral dilemmas in covering sensitive and traumatic issues.

These factors can create a chronic state of **stress**, **exhaustion**, **cynicism**, and **reduced efficacy**, which are the core dimensions of burnout. Burnout can negatively affect journalists' physical and mental health, as well as their performance, creativity, and commitment to their work and organization. Burnout can also lead to turnover, attrition, and loss of talent and diversity in journalism. Therefore, burnout is not only a personal problem but also a professional and societal one, as it can undermine the quality and credibility of journalism and its role in democracy.



“At the Missouri School of Journalism, we are guided by the Missouri Method of hands-on learning. This research takes a page out of that book by getting on-the-ground input from working journalists directly affected by the burnout crisis. At a time when the industry is in need of actionable strategies, the insights and solutions put forward here are informed by real experiences.”



- David Kurpius,
Dean of the School of Journalism
at the University of Missouri

The State of Journalism

This study confirms that journalism in the United States faces significant challenges that may contribute to burnout factors. The first part of the survey aimed to evaluate the environment – emotional and occupational – in the US journalism industry at this time as a frame for burnout solutions offered to the survey takers.

Solutions

This survey design advances beyond the scope of the problem to create a set of potential solutions for those news leaders to consider. After a broad review of burnout solutions currently being used in various newsrooms, the research team at SmithGeiger examined burnout solutions across a broader set of industries, including first responders, doctors, and others who face similar demands. This review generated dozens of potential solutions that the SmithGeiger research team turned into a list of solutions divided into [10 themes](#) offered to survey takers. Each survey respondent was able to pick two potential solution "themes," after which they were asked additional questions about specific potential solutions or actions that newsrooms could take particular to that theme.



"Because this issue has become so widespread, everyone on the research team worked extra hard to get responses from as many newsrooms and journalists as possible so we could be sure to deliver the most useful results."

- Randy Picht, RJI

Addressing Burnout: Proposed Solutions

These survey results confirm that burnout as a newsroom industry issue has reached a critical and urgent stage, with 80% of participants viewing burnout as a major issue, personal impact of burnout among 84% of current and 88% of former journalists, and an industry impact, resulting in staffing issues and low morale that 64% of former and 43% of current professionals pointing to burnout as having a significant effect.

These findings echo past research on journalism burnout, although these new findings should confirm the scope and depth of the problem facing almost every newsroom in the US today. This study hopes to advance past research by pointing to specific actions newsroom leaders can take. The solutions offered in this section of the study come from asking current and former journalists, journalism students, and journalism educators their opinions on what would help.

The research team wanted to identify solutions to burnout that already exist in journalism today and related industries where burnout is a growing concern, as well as potential solutions to burnout that are being discussed worldwide. It is essential to confirm what was said earlier in this paper: **The industry is in a massive flux right now across a wide range of significant economic and consumer shifts that have resulted in shrinking staff and a wide range of pay issues.** While a local newsroom manager may have some control over budgets and the resulting choices in newsroom positions and pay scales, the intent of this research was not to state the obvious that many open-ended responses pointed to (hire more staff, pay more money) but instead, what are the potential solutions that leaders can implement in local newsrooms in the weeks and months ahead. While money would be a welcome solution to many problems in journalism and would no doubt help with addressing burnout factors, this survey sought to identify and rank potential actionable solutions without necessarily being a line item in next year's budget.

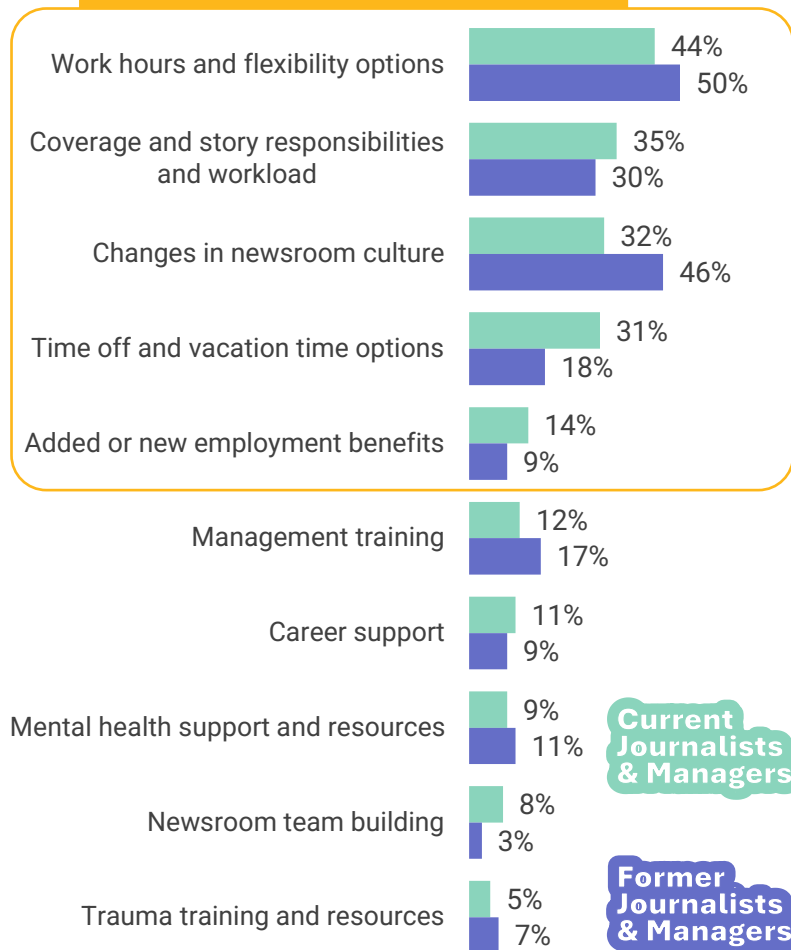
Pick Two Solution Themes



Those who took the survey were given the option of picking two out of a list of potential solutions to burnout with each survey respondent then evaluating a list of options under that theme as desirable solutions. This segmentation of survey paths was needed to control the length of the survey as it is not practical or desirable for a survey respondent to weigh in on every single option for addressing burnout.

The list below gave one-line descriptions (themes) for people to choose from before they were asked to give their evaluation of specific solutions. There are limitations inherent to any survey that includes as many options as were included in this study, but this approach helped us to identify themes and specific actions that local news leaders could investigate for their newsrooms.

TOP 5 AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR ADDRESSING BURNOUT



Overview Of Preferred Solutions

The study identifies **five leading themes** of potential burnout solutions beginning with an emphasis on work flexibility, changes in newsroom culture, management practices including coverage and story responsibilities/workloads, changes in newsroom culture (with almost half of former journalists making this their second highest chosen solutions theme), and related topics of time off/vacation time options, and added or new employment benefits.

While each of these top five solution themes can cost money, there are also many inexpensive concepts for managers to consider daily. These potential solutions may demand more significant time and attention, which is a cost given the many priorities in today's newsrooms. Still, the good news that RJI sees in the results is that there are many ideas that newsrooms already have in place or may have tried in the past but now can be the subject of greater attention.

One Perspective Regarding Many of The Top Solutions

In reviewing the total of the survey responses, there is a strong sense of **"agency"** – the ability for journalists to have more control over their workflows, work environments, and work outputs. The various solutions ranked by current and former journalists should inspire meaningful conversations about what options newsrooms have to give their journalists a greater sense of being involved and being heard in how journalism is practiced going forward.

The Top Five

The entire data sets and future data segmentation will offer newsrooms many options to address burnout in their specific newsrooms. This paper will focus on the top five with the rankings from those who evaluated that theme. It is important to note that those who chose among the other five themes could be as passionate about their choice for other burnout themes. There is no one-size-fits-all for every newsroom or every journalist today, and different newsrooms will need to consider the complete set of solutions offered in this study. Those, for example, who have witnessed crime scenes or wars may be more focused on burnout related to traumatic experiences and the potential remedies for that burnout factor.

All 10 themes of burnout solutions together give a range of rich insights that can suggest many different solution opportunities for newsrooms of almost every size across the industry and country.

We will begin with the theme of the most popular solution set chosen by the survey respondents and offer insights into how they ranked the specific proposed solutions.



How can we help?

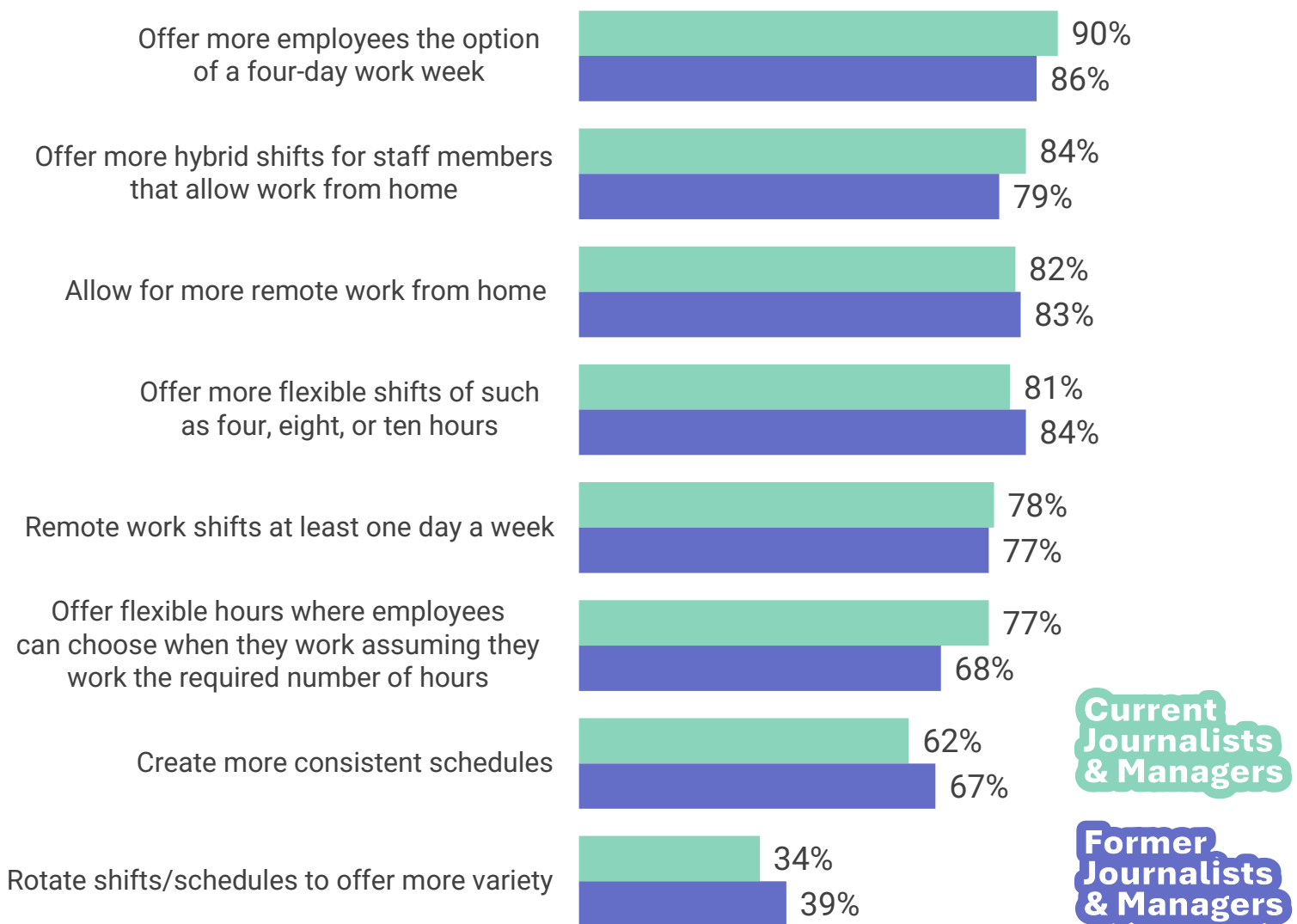
Top Five Areas of Opportunity for Addressing Burnout



Work Hours & Flexibility

The impact of the pandemic on work from home and related reflections on the nature of what work is today in a wired world where employees have many demands at home and work are reflected in the research below. The theme of work hours and flexibility in shifts/workflows was the first choice among current journalists and managers and half of former journalists and managers.

The first option of a four-day work week is already being debated worldwide – as a 32-hour week, 35-hour week, four ten-hour (compressed) shifts, and other variations. RJI is interested in hearing from newsrooms that have explored any of these options and welcomes the opportunity to create case studies around such four-day and more flexible newsroom workflows and schedules.



The second theme was the overall choice of current newsroom employees, and the third highest option for former newsroom staff is a range of topics on how news is covered. Many of these options speak to the time and attention that journalists can give their assignments.

Top Five Areas of Opportunity for Addressing Burnout



Coverage & Story Responsibilities

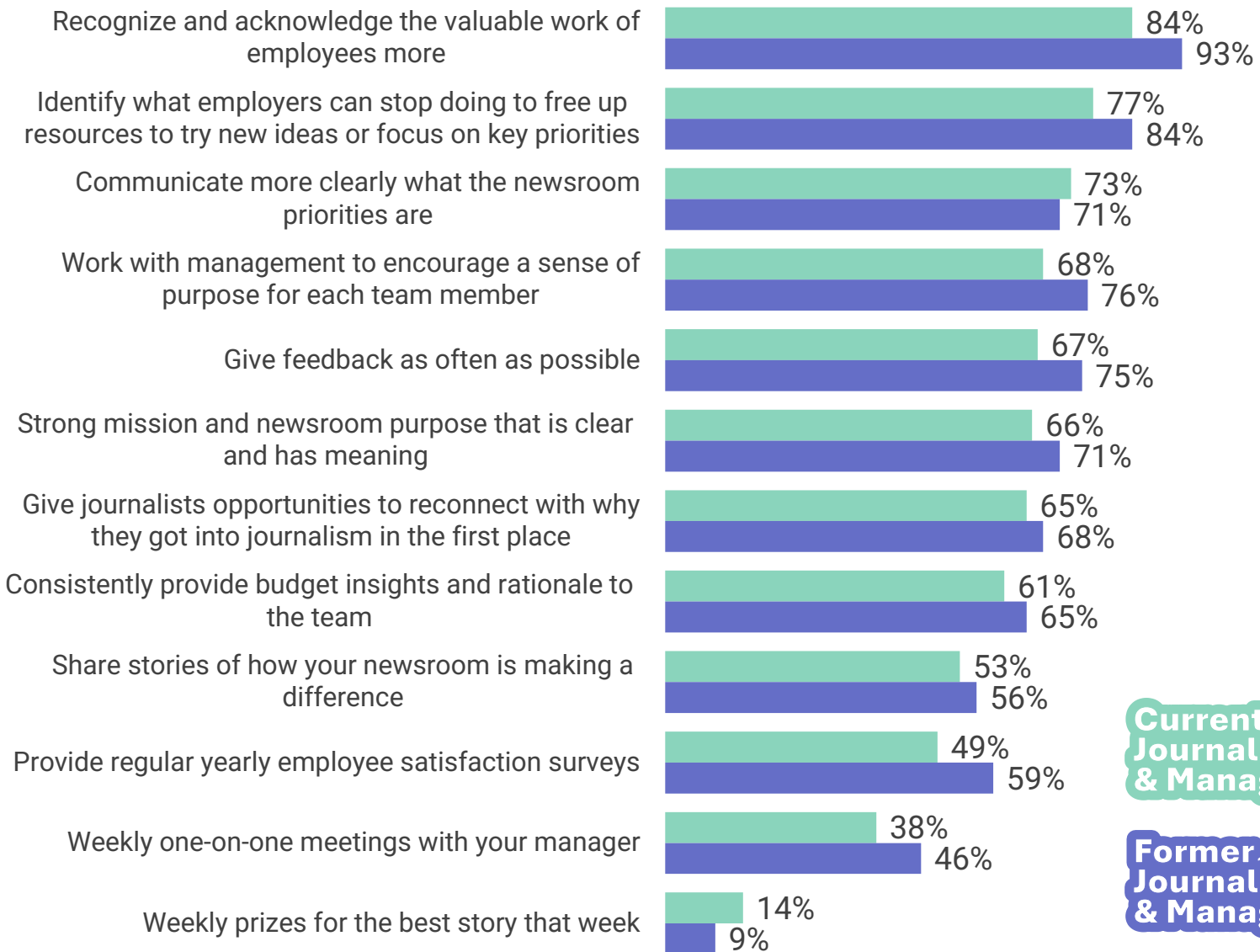


The third most popular theme who responded in this survey and the second most selected theme for former journalists and managers is the core issue of newsroom cultures. Recognition for a job well done leads to a list of solutions. However, there are differences between current and past newsroom employees' recommendations about how newsroom culture is defined and sustained. The suggested burnout solutions for this theme of culture reflect storytelling opportunities for leadership – to explain the mission better and celebrate the work of their teams.

Top Five Areas of Opportunity for Addressing Burnout



Changes to Newsroom Culture



Current Journalists & Managers

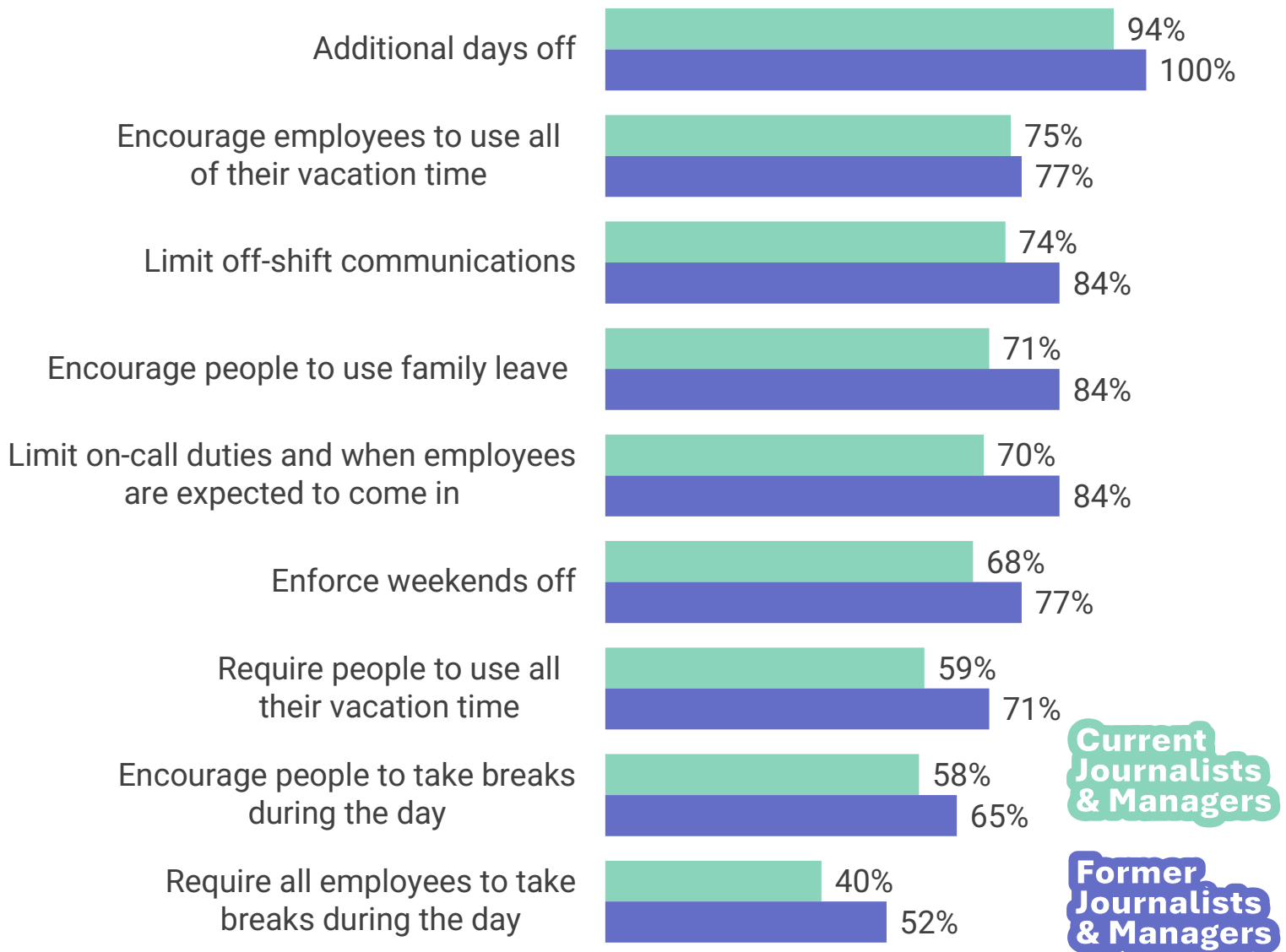
Former Journalists & Managers

Discussion of burnout in any industry would only be complete with a closer look at options to help employees find a work-life balance and opportunities to recharge. This survey found that almost a third of newsroom employees today would like this topic addressed as one of their top two themes to address burnout. The results indicate that a desire for time away from work is precious and should be respected.

Top Five Areas of Opportunity for Addressing Burnout



Time Off & Vacation Time

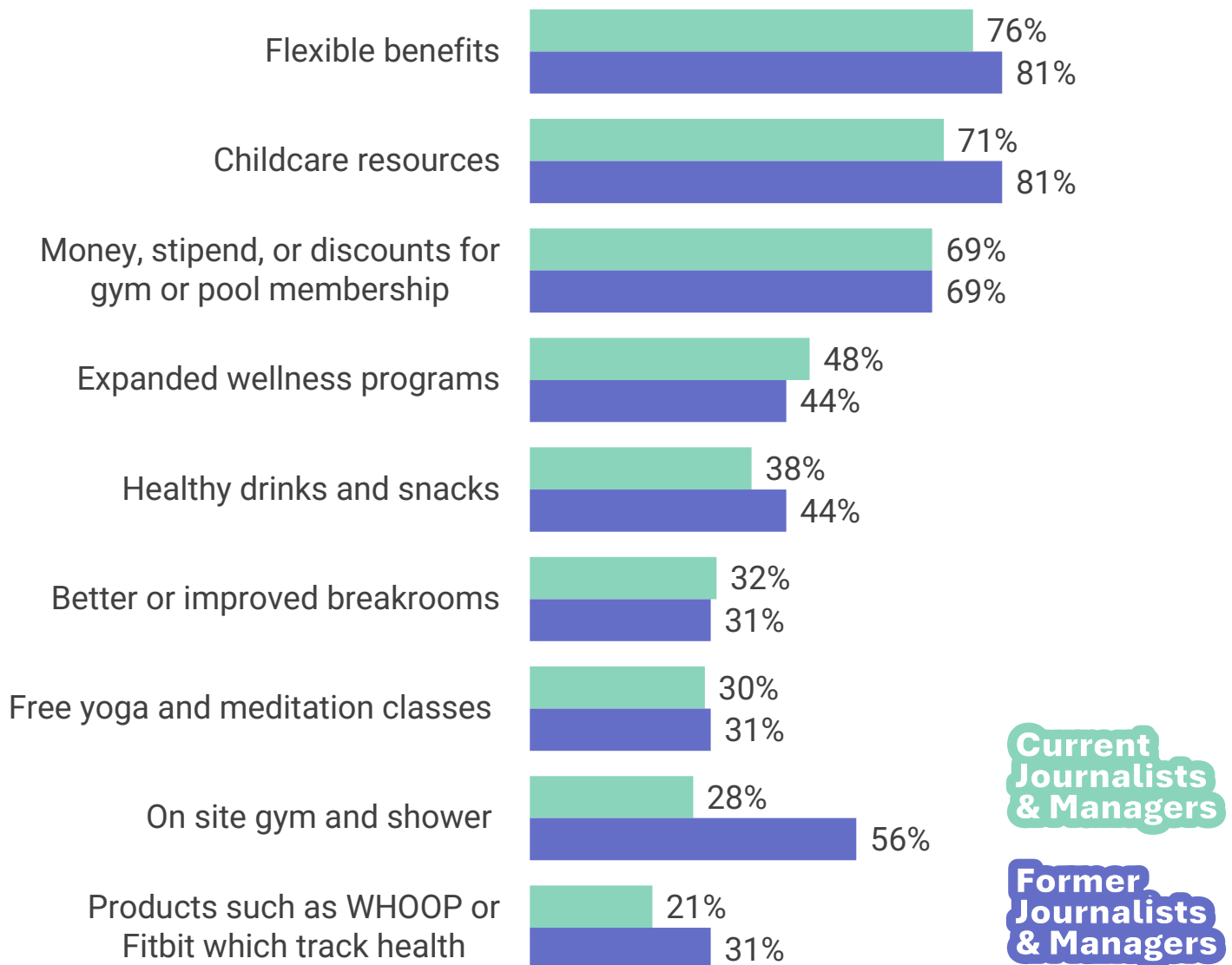


The desire for certain employee benefits as rounding out the top five themes could be seen exclusively through the lens of additional expenses. However, a close examination may also indicate that the preferred solutions help with the work-life balance. As indicated earlier in this paper, RJI intends to do additional segmentation of this and other solutions to identify specific demographics and other factors that indicate some solutions work best with a particular segment of newsroom staff.

Top Five Areas of Opportunity for Addressing Burnout



Added or New Employee Benefits



The Value of Education in Addressing Burnout

In preparing the initial survey, the research team heard industry leaders and journalists asking what future journalists are experiencing in school that might help them prepare not just for journalism but the risk of burnout. While by no means an exhaustive study, the initial findings of a small group of journalism students and journalism educators in this survey should spark a conversation about the opportunities to equip the next generation of journalists better to deal with burnout from the first moment of their new career.

Given the crisis in the industry, education on burnout is seen as critical, with only six percent of current and three percent of former professionals having been exposed to this topic in their earlier journalism training. There is also a strong consensus on incorporating burnout education into the journalism curriculum.

Here are insights that RJI hopes to pursue in greater detail to help journalism programs address this challenge:

- Burnout's reach and impact within journalism are evident. While addressing it within the newsroom is a definitive need, adding it to future journalists' curriculum is beneficial.
- Across the industry, students, faculty, and professionals are all exposed to ethics and reporting in their formal education, but burnout has only recently been included in journalism education.
- Historically, just six percent of current journalism professionals and three percent of former professionals were exposed to any information about burnout in their education.
- While 37% of current J-School students are being taught about burnout, the benefit of expanded education on the topic is clear.
- 53% of current students agree that burnout education is critically beneficial, and overall, 98% see it as at least somewhat helpful.
- Burnout as an element of critical educational benefit is second only to work/life balance among current students.
- Two in three faculty see burnout education as a benefit to their students, and 56% agree they would benefit from it.



These initial and limited results should, along with the rest of this research, spark conversations about how to best prepare student journalists for the demanding work environment they are about to enter.

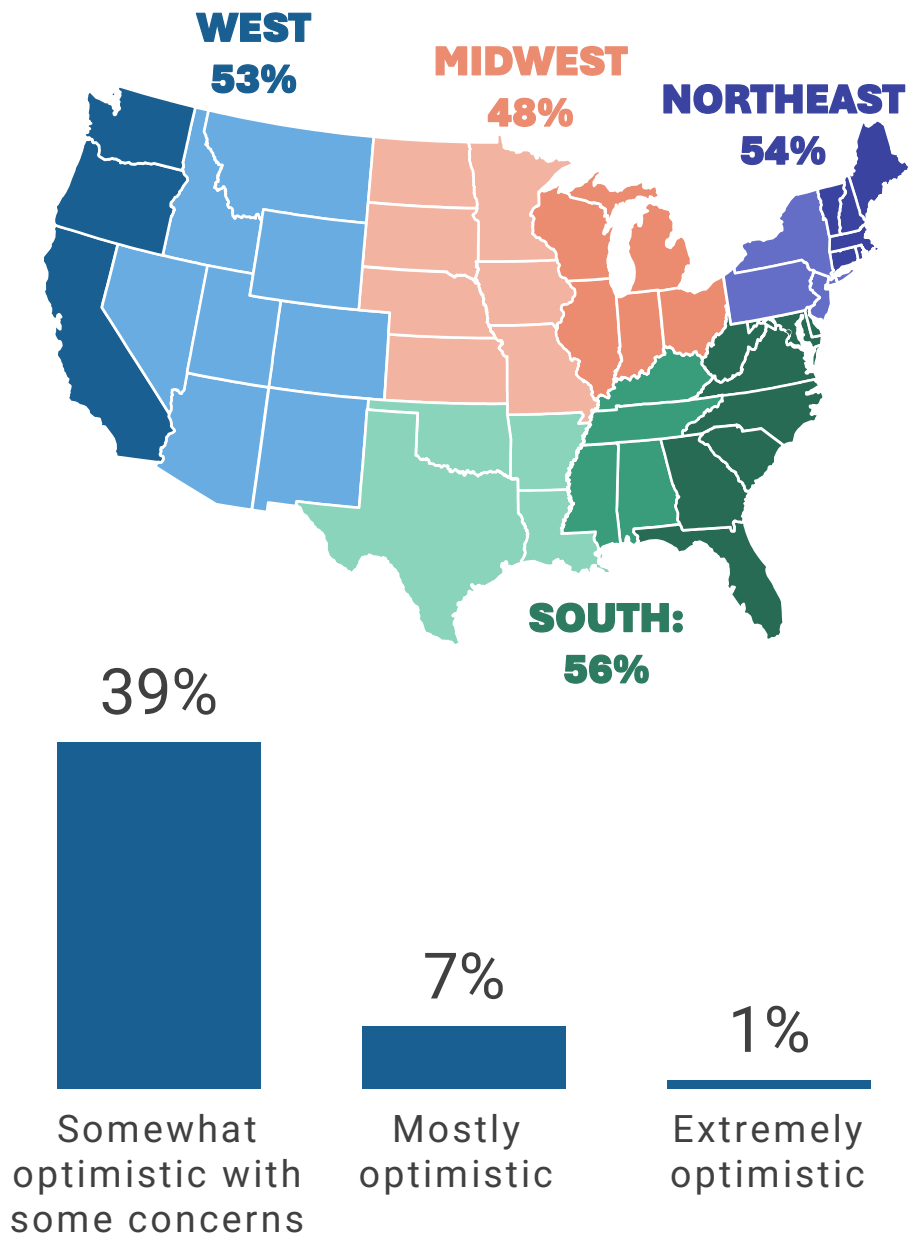
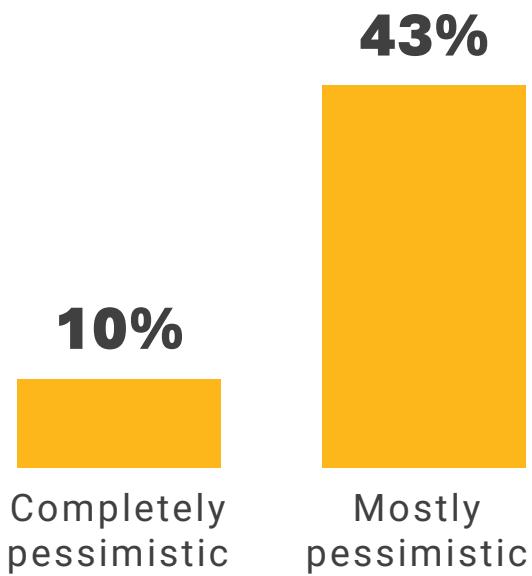
Pessimism

The respondents to this survey paint a stark picture of an industry battling pessimism, burnout, and an increasingly challenging news landscape. Fifty-six percent of active journalists are mostly pessimistic, rising to 83% among former journalists and journalism managers. In contrast, only 36% of active managers felt "mostly pessimistic." This data point may suggest future research as to the cause of the contrast between leadership and rank and file.

Examining this same question through geography, "mostly pessimistic" rises to 56% in the South.

OVERALL PESSIMISM:

Overall	53%
18 to 24	36%
25 to 34	63%
35 to 44	55%
45 to 54	55%
55 to 64	49%
65+ or older	46%
Active Journalists	56%
Active Management	36%
Former Journalists/Management	83%





Difficulties in News Coverage

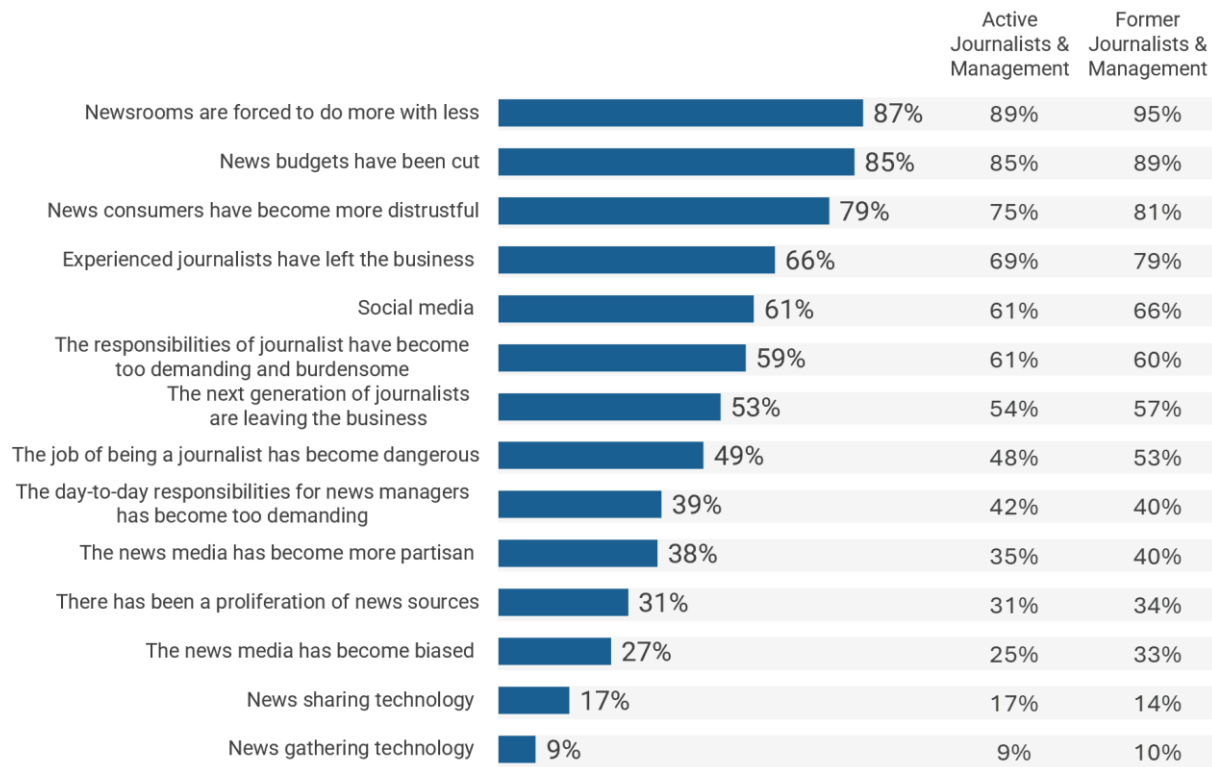
Overall, 36% of today's journalists find covering news more challenging than in the past, but there is a contrast between journalists and managers. Twenty-nine percent of active journalists feel this way vs. 43% of active journalism managers.

	TOTAL	Active Journalists	Active Management
Covering the news is much more challenging today	36%	29%	43%
It is somewhat more challenging	20%	19%	19%
It is harder in some ways and easier in some ways	39%	45%	33%
It is somewhat less challenging	3%	4%	3%
Covering the news has gotten much less challenging today	2%	3%	2%

Negative Impacts

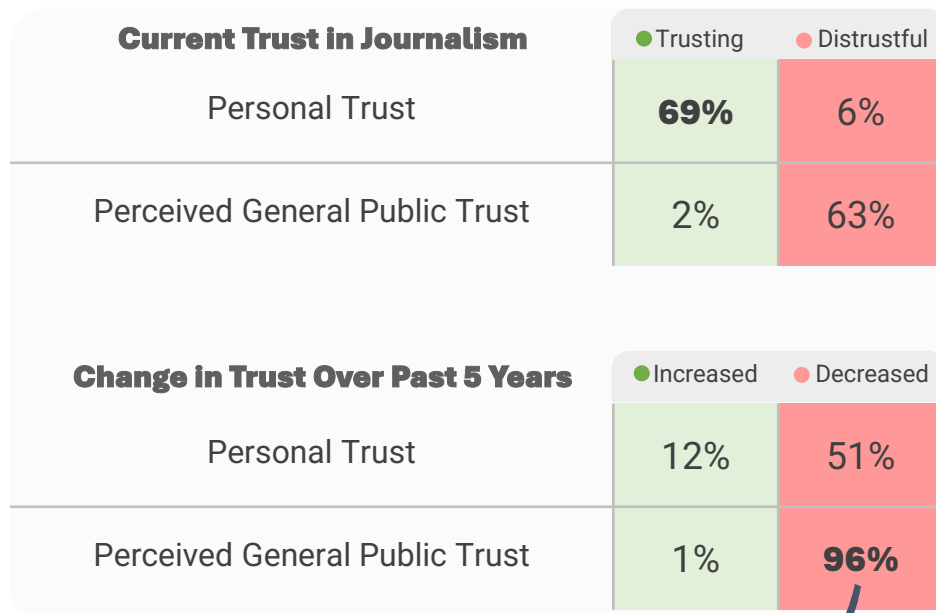
The survey was done before many of the most recent cutbacks in newsrooms that have led to thousands losing their jobs; there was already concern about newsrooms doing more with less and related factors such as budget cuts that may be strangling some of the resources needed to be combined with the perception of growing distrust from consumers, and the disruptive influence of social media that is a negative factor today for journalism.

How does an eroding sense of trust in one's work impact the commitment to creating journalism and increase the risk of burnout, especially in such a contentious political environment?



While many of these negative factors reflect macro shifts of media fragmentation, economic disruption, and changes in content platform use, it may be worth additional research on why and how social media is seen as a negative issue, especially among different demographics in journalism today.

Also seen is a significant and recurring theme in a notable number of media research regarding the growing lack of trust in media. This survey examined this vital question of public distrust in two further dimensions – **where journalists perceive the public's trust in journalism (vs. their perspective) now and how it has shifted over the last five years.** It shows an awareness of the growing public mistrust of some journalism. However, it is a topic that deserves additional attention – how does an eroding sense of trust in one's work impact the commitment to creating journalism and increase the risk of burnout, especially in such a contentious political environment?



Over the last five years, both personal trust and perceived trust in journalism have taken a significant hit, with 96% of respondents believing the general public has decreased trust in journalism.

Negative Impacts

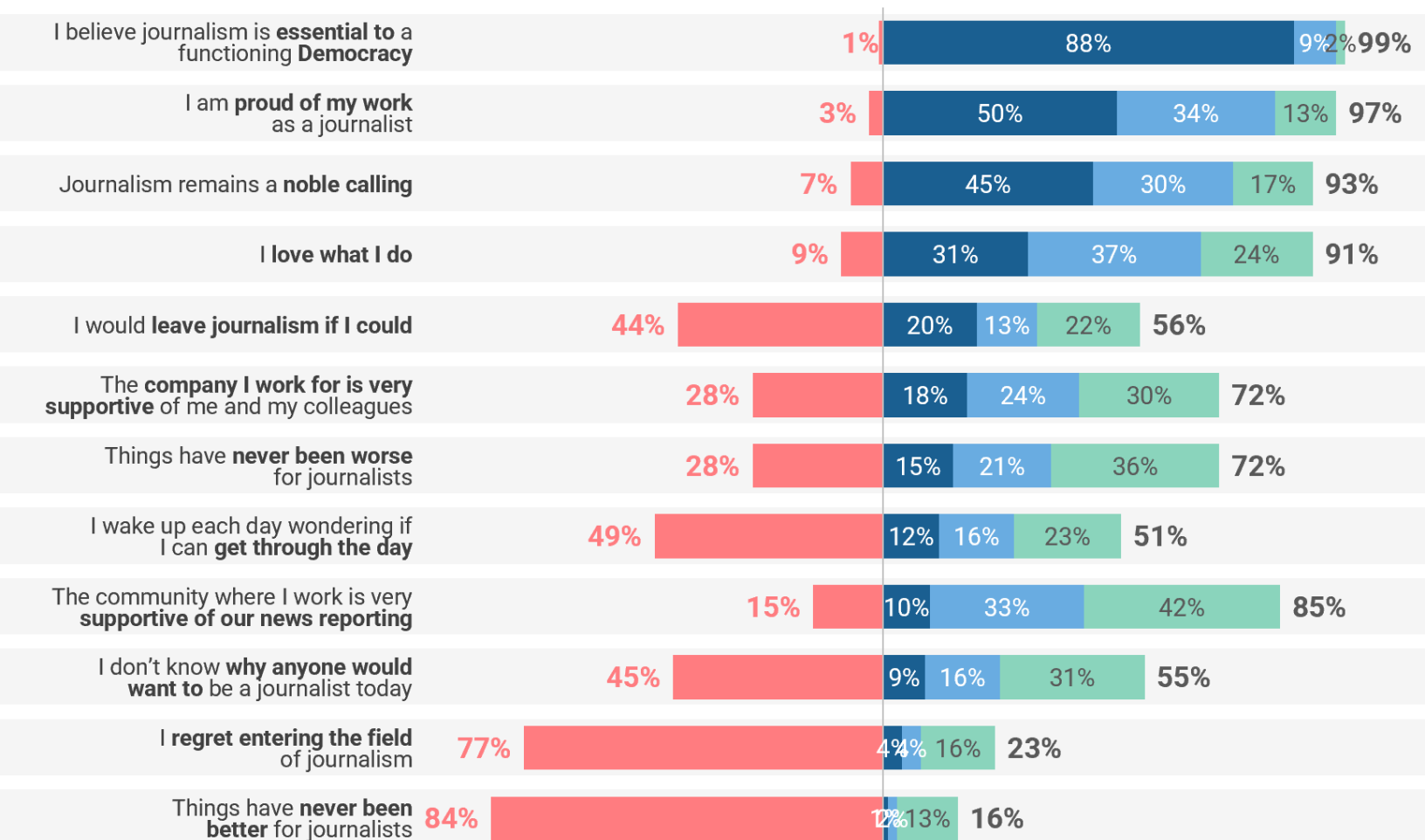
Related to the issues of a lack of trust and hyperpartisanship is another finding that bears additional research – almost half of journalists said the job has become dangerous. This survey did not establish if they felt that work was becoming personally hazardous or if it reflects how journalists are under attack worldwide. Still, it suggested that the perception of either or both dangers potentially contributes to burnout in newsrooms anywhere today.

Given the negative factors that weigh on journalism today, the survey wanted to explore if some perceptions of journalism today are helping motivate journalists and perhaps counteract burnout threats. The vast majority (99%) agree fully or to some degree that journalism is essential to democracy. They are also proud of what they do (97% total agree), see journalism as a noble calling (93% total agree), and love what they do (91% total agree).

This sense of purpose is contrasted with several statements that indicate that despite the critical value of what they do, more than half (56% total agree) would leave journalism if they could. Another majority (51% total agree) say they wake up each day wondering if they can get through the day. Yet, another majority (55% total agree) wonder why anyone would want to be a journalist today. However, in contrast with that majority, only slightly under a fourth of journalists (23% total agree) regret entering the field of journalism.

Worth future investigation are two sources of support, with 3/4ths of journalists taking this survey saying they agree to various degrees that their company is very supportive of journalists. More than eight out of ten journalists believe to varying degrees that the community where they work is very supportive of their news reporting. This internal and external "support" is worthy of additional research on how newsrooms support staff and what actions or reactions show the community is supporting journalism currently.

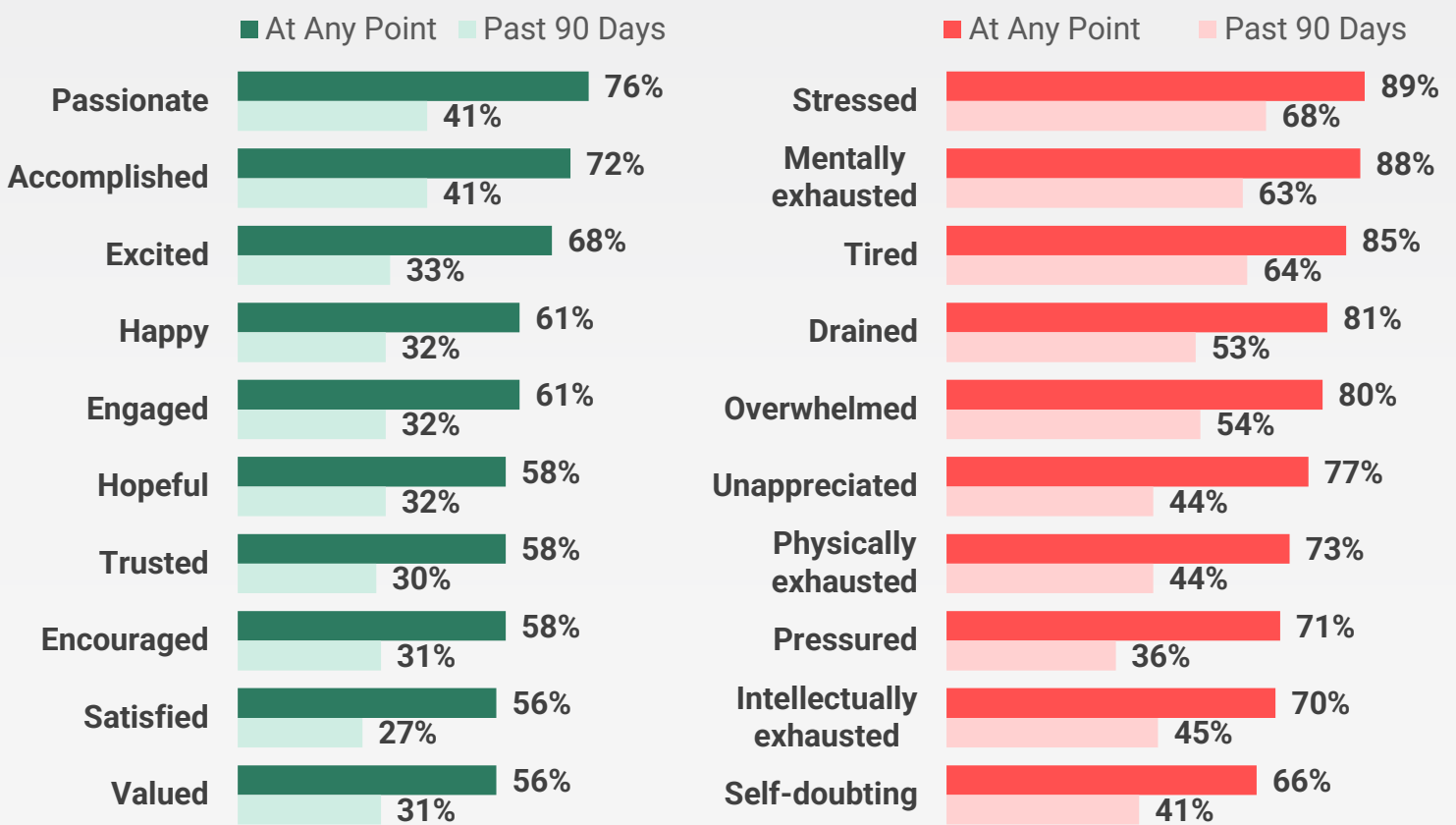
■ Agree completely
 ■ Agree mostly
 ■ Agree partially
 ■ Disagree mostly/completely



Positive and Negative Emotions

The survey gave respondents a scale of emotional responses that could cause burnout or immunize journalists and newsroom leaders from burnout. The emotional reactions typically associated with burnout are plentiful and, in many cases, almost daily experiences for many journalists.

Which of the following feelings, sentiments, or attitudes have you personally experienced as part of your professional or academic life at any point/ in the last 90 days?

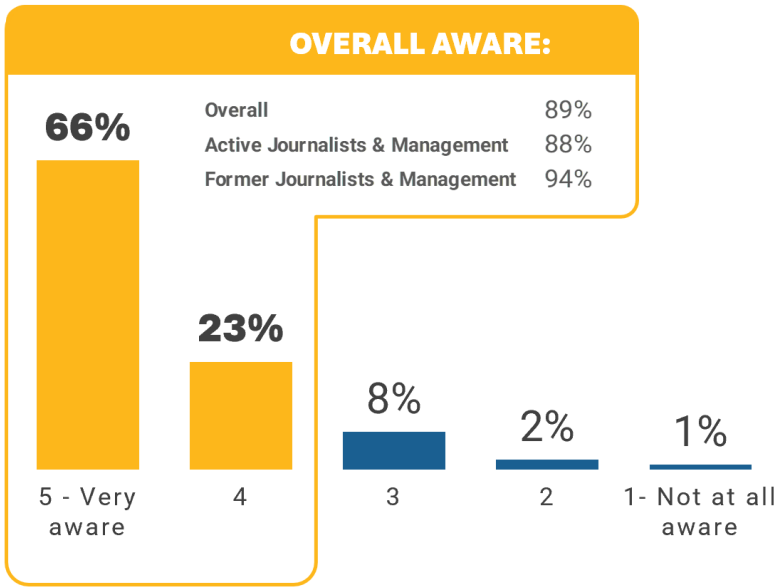


While workers outside of journalism could also give similar perspectives on their strained emotional state, especially after the pandemic tested society and individuals, this new finding that at any point, the majority of journalists self-report that they have been stressed (89%), mentally exhausted (88%), tired (85%), drained (81%), overwhelmed (80%) as among their top five negative emotions leaves little doubt that the mood of many journalists is primed for burnout to set in despite their top five feelings (at any point) of being passionate (76%), accomplished (72%), excited (68%), happy (61%) and hopeful (58%).

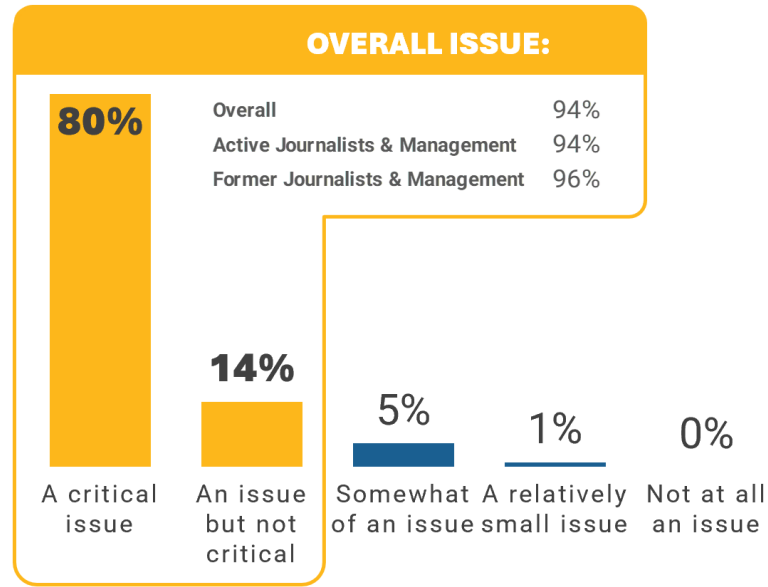
Burnout in Journalism

The journalism industry professionals, former professionals, students, and educators who participated in this survey see burnout as a leading concern in the industry. Burnout in journalism as an issue is nearly universal, and awareness is high – rising to 94% of former journalists and news management say they know the concept of burnout. The impact of burnout within journalism has also reached "critical mass," with 80% overall feeling burnout is a critical issue and only one percent saying it is a relatively minor issue or not an issue at all.

Aware of The Concept of "Burnout"

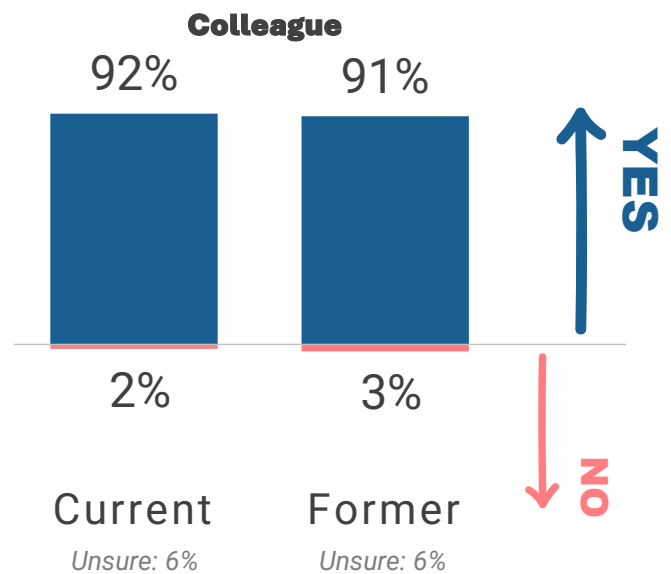
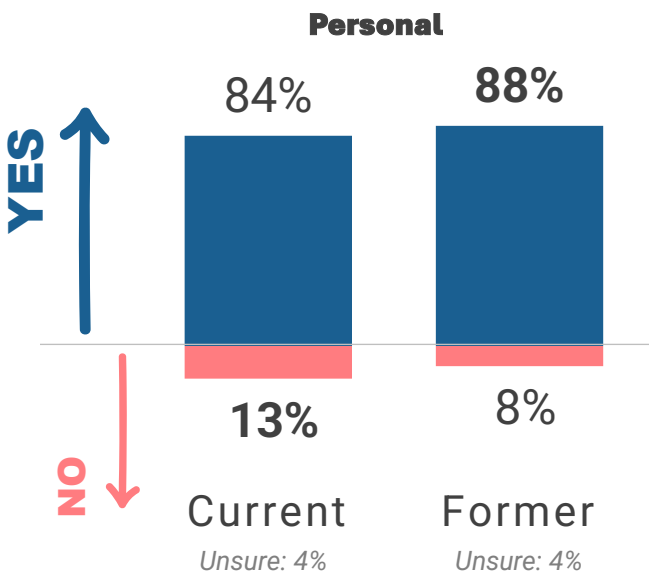


How big of an issue is Burnout in Journalism?



Burnout is having a universal impact.

Eighty-four percent of current and 88% of former journalists say burnout has impacted them personally, and more than 9 in 10 have a colleague impacted. Just 13% of current and 8% of former journalists have never experienced burnout in their professional careers.



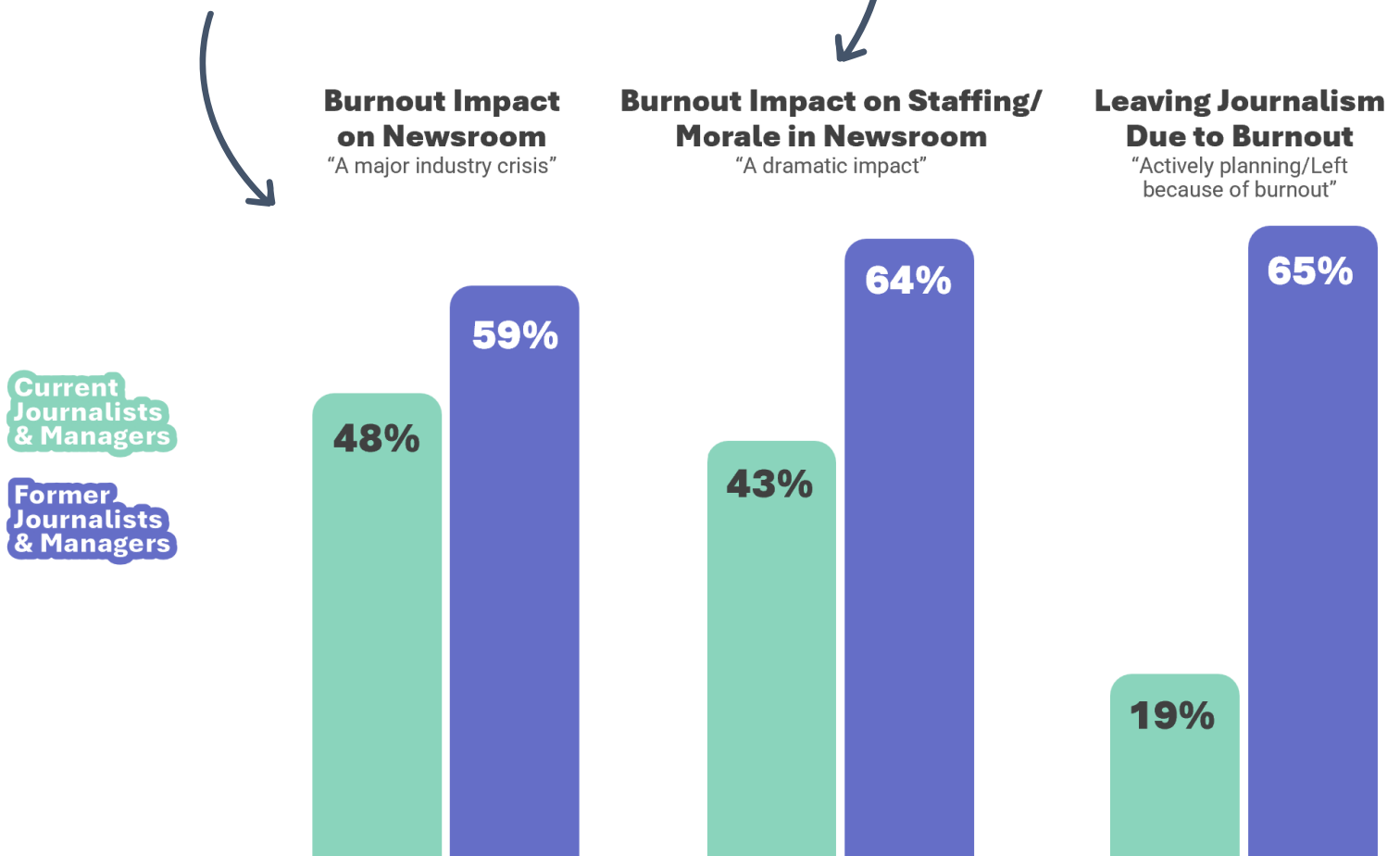
Burnout in Journalism

All indications are that burnout leads to journalism professionals leaving the industry. This issue will likely grow with one in five active journalism professionals actively planning on leaving because of burnout. As proof of the future threat, two in three former professionals say burnout contributed to their leaving journalism.

Aside from the personal impact on journalism professionals, burnout impacts overall newsroom morale and staffing, raising the specter that even more qualified and experienced journalists who represent hard-earned capabilities and knowledge, as well as the next generation of journalists, could leave many newsrooms over burnout concerns.

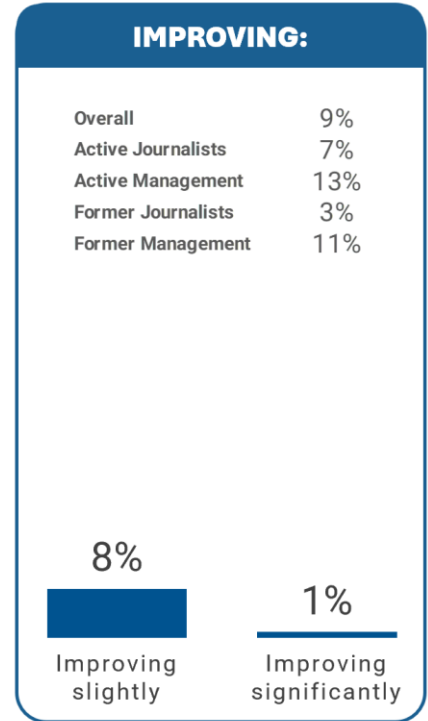
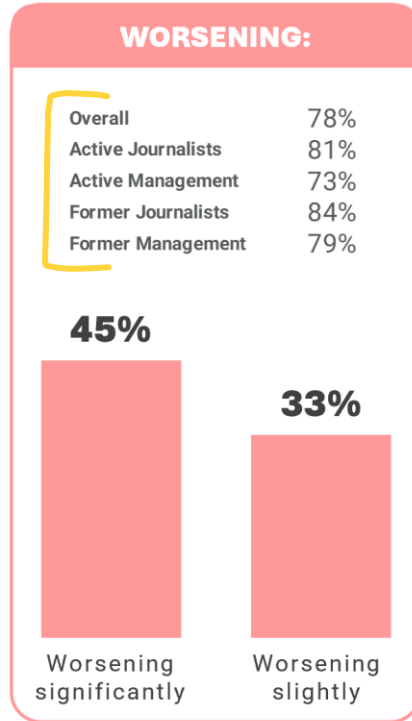
Half (48%) of all active journalism professionals see burnout as a significant industry crisis – climbing to 59% among former professionals.

64% of former professionals and 43% of current professionals see burnout as dramatically impacting staffing and newsroom morale.



A Growing Crisis

In the minds of the more than 1000 respondents who took this survey, there is little question that over the next five years, current and former industry professionals agree that **burnout will worsen**, with 45% seeing burnout worsening significantly.



Pessimism is not a business plan.



Expected Burnout Impact in Journalism Over the Next 5 Years

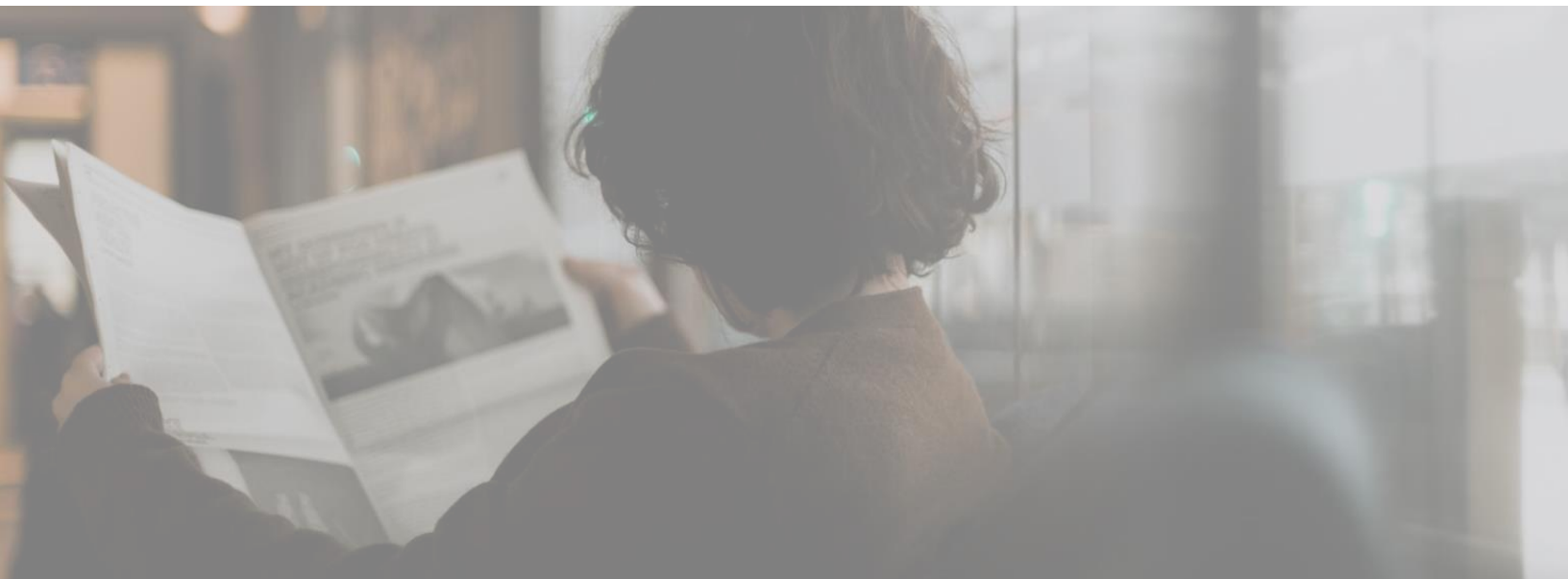
Current and Former Industry Professionals See Burnout Getting Worse Before it Gets Better

Segmenting The Survey Results

RJI will expand the value of this survey in the weeks and months ahead by examining different segments of respondents. The survey design can give researchers and journalism leaders a closer look at many other facets of the respondents. For this overview of the research, we have focused on two key categories – current journalists and newsroom managers alongside former journalists and newsroom managers. The RJI team intends to segment the research in many different directions – demographic, geographic, and industry sectors- although many other segments can be examined. RJI welcomes partners to take a closer look at the crisis in burnout through these different segments and a more detailed look at what solutions will most help the diverse categories of newsroom employees.

The Need for Additional Research

As with the vital research that preceded this study, new research into burnout in journalism often raises new questions about the factors leading to burnout and possible remedies to this crisis. Throughout this research, there are suggestions of potential lines of additional inquiry and exploration beyond expanded segmentation of the problem and potential solutions. **RJI invites those interested in expanding on this research to contact the Institute.** One concept that RJI is particularly interested in and that this research briefly explored is the current state of journalism burnout training in US journalism programs. This study asked a small subsection of journalism students and faculty for their perspectives, hoping the initial results would inspire additional conversation and more in-depth research.



The **Burnout** Crisis in Journalism

January 2024

Thank you!

rji would like to thank the University of Missouri School of Journalism and [Dean David Kurpius](#) for supporting the development and deployment of the study across the industry and journalism programs nationwide. The Institute would also like to thank the journalism organizations and individuals who took part in distributing and taking this study. Without their active interest, this study would not have had the notable number of diverse participants from all parts of journalism today across fifty states.



Summary

This survey confirms that burnout in journalism is a nearly universal experience and a pervasive issue affecting journalists at all levels. The problem's scope and growing intensity are why there is such an essential need for solutions for managers to act on. While awareness of burnout is high, the topic may not be the daily focus of leadership to the degree this study suggests it could be.

To help fuel the conversations that this research suggests, here are the top 10 solutions taken from the research regarding current newsroom staff and managers:

CURRENT STAFF

- Offer employees the option of a **four-day workweek**.
- Offer more **hybrid shifts** for staff members that allow work-from-home.
- Allow for more **remote work** from home.
- Offer more **flexible shifts** such as 4, 8, or 10 hours.
- **Remote work** shifts at least one day a week.
- **Flexible hours** where employees can choose when they work assuming they work the required number of hours.
- Regularly **evaluating workloads** of journalists and different teams.
- Additional **days off**.
- Managers allow employees to have some **input regarding how work gets done**.
- Let journalists have more **input into how they do their job**.

For former journalists and newsroom leaders, the top 10 solutions include:

FORMER STAFF

- Recognize and **acknowledge the valuable work** of employees more.
- Offer more employees the option of a **four-day workweek**.
- Offer more **flexible shifts** such as 4, 8, or 10 hours.
- Allow for more **remote work** from home.
- Offer more **hybrid shifts** for staff members that allow work-from-home.
- **Remote work** shifts at least one day a week.
- Identify what employers can stop doing to **free up resources** to try new ideas or focus on critical priorities.
- Work with management to **encourage a sense of purpose** for each team member.
- Give **feedback** as often as possible.
- **Flexible hours** - employees choose when they work, assuming they work the required hours.

RJI hopes that this survey will inspire a multi-faceted approach to this problem. The study points to a range of solutions that local managers can consider, including work flexibility, professional autonomy, and cultural shifts in newsrooms with repeating overall desires for work-life balance, professional agency, and a commitment to recognize the value of journalism and journalists.

RJI recognizes the widespread economic and news consumer changes that are challenging the industry, with the profession facing increasing demands with fewer resources. Those pressures are unlikely to lessen, so it is essential to know what options newsrooms have to address the impact of burnout.

How Can This Study Be Used by Newsrooms

This study can guide newsrooms to form a specific and actionable plan to begin addressing their own issues with burnout. RJI recognizes that there will need to be a matrix of solutions tailored to the different demographics, job classifications, and industry sectors and looks forward to providing additional insights that can be drawn from this extensive data set.

The research suggests that a review of this research can be used to help newsrooms evaluate the strategies and best practices that can be implemented to prevent and mitigate burnout, such as fostering a supportive and flexible work culture, providing adequate resources and training, recognizing and rewarding achievements, and promoting work-life balance and self-care. The research also offers suggestions and recommendations for newsroom leaders and journalists on using the data and findings to initiate and sustain a dialogue and HR plans on burnout in their organizations.

Case Studies

RJI has already heard of newsrooms tackling the complex issues involved in burnout and welcomes their real-world examples of actions taken. RJI hopes to construct case studies that show how newsrooms are being proactive in addressing burnout and welcomes newsrooms that would like to experiment with some of the solutions suggested by this research. Interested research partners can contact RJI at:

Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute
401 S. Ninth St.
Administrative Offices, Suite 300,
Columbia MO 65211
573-884-9121
rji@rjionline.org

A Final Call to Action

The research highlights the urgent need to address burnout in journalism. Solutions should focus on improving work conditions, encouraging professional autonomy, and recognizing the critical work of journalists. The sustainability of the journalism industry may depend in part on future steps taken with these findings and implementing changes that support journalists' well-being and professional efficacy.



Additional Research

This study was designed to raise new questions and start meaningful conversations about the potential solutions to the burnout issue impacting newsrooms in the US. As with any substantial research, additional examination and segmentation of the data will open new avenues of information regarding different segments of the US journalism industry and the different solutions that could appeal to various demographics and industry sectors. It will also suggest new research that can help journalists understand further related issues, such as the perceived erosion of the news audience's trust in journalism and reporting today, and into the various solutions, such as more details on the value of and implementation of solutions, such as modified work schedules.

Potential academic and industry partners are welcome to discuss this study and possible applications.

RJI is ready to provide additional insights and data on the prevalence, dimensions, and sources of burnout and the effects of burnout on journalists' health, performance, and retention that can be drawn from this data set. The research also provides a benchmark and a baseline for future studies and evaluations on burnout in journalism.

Future Efforts

RJI is committed to fully distributing these survey results and supporting additional discussion of this critical research. The Institute has additional releases of data and insights planned in the months ahead and will be available to academic and industry partners who want to explore this issue further. The RJI team will continue exploring solutions suggested in this research and provide additional information and case studies of implementation in the months ahead.

The RJI team will also consider plans to expand and diversify the sample and scope of the research, to include more journalists and newsroom leaders from different types of media outlets, regions, and backgrounds, as well as to explore more dimensions and aspects of burnout, such as its relationship with trust, diversity, and innovation. The RJI team also plans to disseminate and share the data and findings of the research through various channels and formats, such as reports, articles, podcasts, webinars, and workshops, which can reach and inform a broader and more diverse audience of newsroom leaders, journalists, and other stakeholders.

Conclusion

We thank you for your attention to this research and hope this paper is food for thought and inspiration for action. 2024 will be an intensive and important year full of challenges and an opportunity for journalists to serve their communities and country. Never has the need been greater for journalists to feel supported in their vital work and their role in democracy. This study points to the potential solutions that can prevent or limit burnout that could otherwise damage the capabilities of journalists and their newsrooms to serve the public interest. We welcome your feedback and suggestions for how to build on this research in the future.

Transparency Statements

About RJI

The Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) works with the news industry, professors, students, and others to ensure journalism has a bright future. As a part of the Missouri School of Journalism, RJI offers a variety of fellowships, initiatives, events, and experiments that aim to improve and strengthen journalism and its practices.

The Donald W. Reynolds Institute (RJI) was launched in 2004 with a grant of \$31 million from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation. In conjunction with the centennial celebration of the Missouri School of Journalism, RJI's headquarters were opened in September 2008. The Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) empowers journalists with knowledge, tools, and funding to strengthen journalism through practical innovation.

More About the Study and Research

The RJI research project was based on a survey designed by the SmithGeiger Group research team, drawing on the existing literature and theories on burnout, journalism, and organizational behavior. The survey consisted of multiple-choice and open-ended questions that measured burnout, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention among journalists and newsroom leaders. The survey also asked about the perceived causes and consequences of burnout and the strategies and resources that newsrooms use or could use to prevent and mitigate burnout. The survey was pre-tested and refined before being launched online.

AI

AI use in this report was limited to copy editing and was not used to directly create content for this research with the explicit purpose of improving the clarity and grammatical accuracy of this content. AI did not design the survey or analyze the responses. The research and this white paper reflect the human expertise and judgment of the RJI and SmithGeiger Group staff.

Contact Us

For additional information, please visit:

[The Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute](#)

[The SmithGeiger Group](#)

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This white paper was produced in partnership with the SmithGeiger Group. Designed by Coley Lippard. The project lead was Andrew Finlayson, EVP of Digital and AI Strategies. The lead researcher for SmithGeiger was Sam Walton, Director of Media Insights and Strategies.

Appendix



SmithGeiger Group partners and clients include most major media companies in the United States and many international media organizations. Their research and consulting have touched radio and television, digital and streaming, social media, and print media nationwide.

We help newsrooms grow their reach, reputation, revenue and relevancy. We work across platforms with the latest research guided insights into how to help your audience discover your content, the best ways to display that content, and the strategic distribution of your valued content.

