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Investigative Journalists and Digital Security

Perceptions of Vulnerability and Changes in Behavior

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

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About This Report

This report aims at understanding the attitudes of investigative journalists toward digital security, electronic surveillance and hacking. Data in this report are drawn from an online survey conducted December 3-28, 2014, among a representative sample of 671 members of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. (IRE). The online survey was funded in part by a grant from Columbia University's Tow Center for Digital Journalism.

This report is a collaborative effort based on the input and analysis of the following individuals:

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About Pew Research Center

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Overview

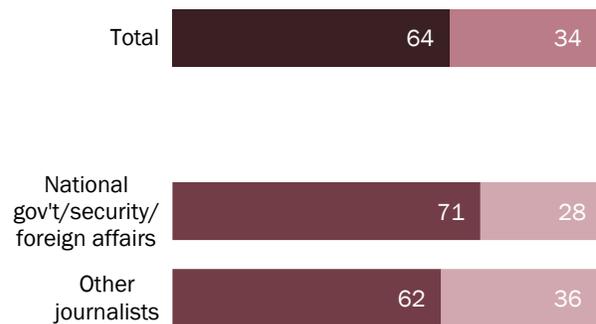
About two-thirds of investigative journalists surveyed (64%) believe that the U.S. government has probably collected data about their phone calls, emails or online communications, and eight-in-ten believe that being a journalist increases the likelihood that their data will be collected. Those who report on national security, foreign affairs or the federal government are particularly likely to believe the government has already collected data about their electronic communications (71% say this is the case), according to a new survey of members of Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) – a nonprofit member organization for journalists – by the Pew Research Center in association with Columbia University’s Tow Center for Digital Journalism.¹

Thus far, concerns about surveillance and hacking have mostly fallen short of keeping many journalists from pursuing a story or a source; Just 14% say that in the past 12 months, such concerns have kept them from pursuing a story or reaching out to a particular source, or have led them to consider leaving investigative journalism altogether.

Most Investigative Journalists Believe the U.S. Government Collected Data About Their Communications

% of IRE journalists who believe that the government...

■ Probably collected data ■ Probably did not collect data



IRE Journalists Survey. Dec. 3 – 28, 2014. Q17. National gov't/security/foreign affairs journalists (N=164). Other journalists (N=507).

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¹ For the purpose of this study, members who were not based in the United States, or who did not identify themselves as practicing journalists (educators or students, for instance) were excluded from further sampling.

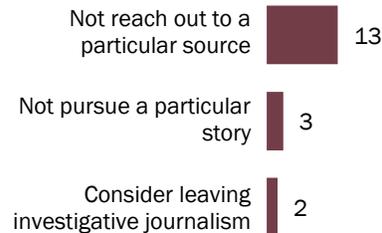
Still, these concerns have led many of these journalists to alter their behavior in the past 12 months. Nearly half (49%) say they have at least somewhat changed the way they store or share sensitive documents, and 29% say the same of the way they communicate with other reporters, editors or producers.

And among the 454 respondents who identify as reporters, 38% say that in the past year they have at least somewhat changed the way they communicate with sources.

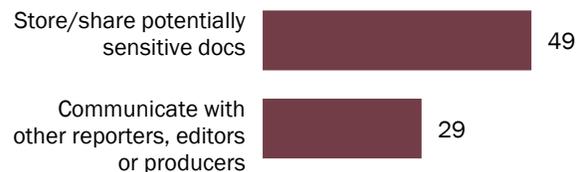
When it comes to external protection from digital threats like surveillance and hacking, these investigative journalists do not put much stock in their internet service providers (referred to as ISPs). Just 2% have “a lot of confidence” their ISP can protect their data from being accessed by unauthorized parties, while 71% have not much or no confidence at all.

Stories Still Pursued; Some Change in Security Practices

% of IRE journalists who say concerns about electronic surveillance and hacking led them to...



And % who say that in the past 12 months they have at least somewhat changed the way they...

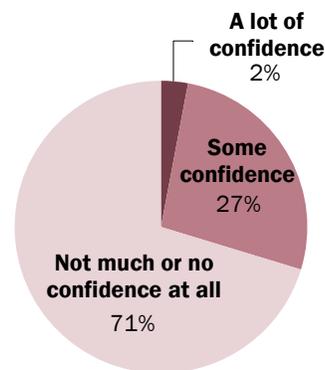


IRE Journalists Survey. Dec. 3 – 28, 2014. Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9.

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Most Investigative Journalists Have Little Confidence That ISPs Can Protect Their Data

% of IRE journalists who have ___ in their ISP



IRE Journalists Survey. Dec. 3 – 28, 2014. Q14. Those who did not answer amounted to less than 1%.

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News organizations get mixed reviews for their ability to protect the security of their employees' communications. Among those who work for news organizations (589 of the 671 journalists surveyed), half say their employer is *not* doing enough to protect journalists and their sources from surveillance and hacking, while about the same share (47%) says they are doing enough. Just 21% say their organization has taken steps or implemented policies in the past year to protect journalists and their sources, while 36% say their organization has not, and 42% do not know. About half (54%) report getting no formal training or instruction on electronic security issues from professional sources such as journalism associations, news organizations or journalism schools.

Still, other issues are more pressing for the profession than surveillance and hacking. When asked to rank four challenges facing journalists today, an overwhelming majority (88%) of journalists identify decreasing resources in newsrooms as their top concern. No other issue comes close. Following far behind are: legal action against journalists (5%), electronic surveillance by governments or corporations (4%) and hacking targeted at journalists or news organizations (1%).

Furthermore, relatively few journalists (27%) have spent at least "some time" in the past 12 months researching how to improve their electronic security.

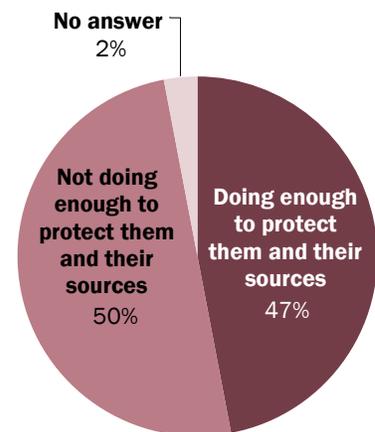
Overall, these data paint a complex picture in which investigative journalists on the whole feel vulnerable to surveillance and hacking, but not to the degree that most are changing their journalistic practices dramatically or investing energy into figuring out how to do so. And nearly all of those surveyed (97%) say that for today's journalists, the benefits of digital communication like email and cellphones outweigh the risks. Just 3% say the risks outweigh the benefits.

About This Survey

The analysis in this report is based on an online survey conducted from December 3-28, 2014, with a representative sample of 671 journalists who are members of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. (IRE). The 671 investigative journalists include a mix of reporters, producers, editors, data specialists, photojournalists and others, and comprise a wide range of coverage areas.

Journalists Split on How Well Their Organizations Protect Them Against Surveillance and Hacking

Among IRE journalists who work in a news organization, % who say their organization is...



IRE Journalists Survey. Dec. 3 - 28, 2014. Q10. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding. N=589.

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The survey was written and analyzed by Pew Research Center staff, and field work was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI). Email invitations containing individualized survey links to access the online study were sent to 2,723 investigative journalists in the United States who are members of IRE. Journalists also had the option of returning a print version of the survey through the mail. For more detailed information, see the Methodology section.

Investigative Journalists' Perceptions About the Surveillance Climate

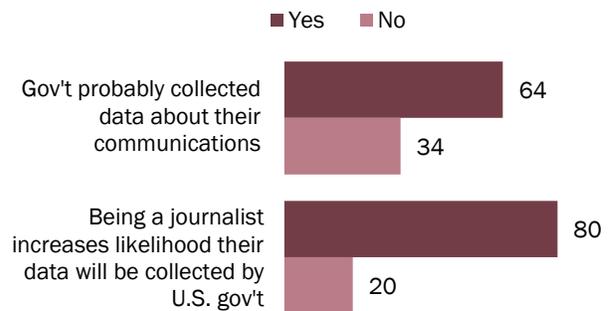
About two-thirds of IRE journalists (64%) believe that the U.S. government probably has collected data about their own phone calls, emails or online communications. This perception is especially prevalent among those who cover national security, foreign affairs or the federal government. Fully 71% of this group says the government has likely collected this data.

Eight-in-ten of all journalists surveyed (80%) express the belief that being a journalist increases the likelihood that their data will be collected by the U.S. government.

Despite a majority believing they *may* be electronically surveilled, particularly because of their work in journalism, open-end responses reflect wide-ranging views about the real possibility of the government collecting data about their communications. While some journalists clearly feel vulnerable or work under the assumption that all electronic communications can be monitored (“I figure everything I do is tracked”), others see this monitoring as such a remote possibility that it does not warrant much attention (“I don’t worry too much”). Many assert that only journalists focusing on national issues or government investigations would be monitored, and some feel the likelihood of being monitored in the U.S. is small compared with the likelihood of experiencing it in other countries.

Most Investigative Journalists Believe the U.S. Government Has Collected Their Data

% of all IRE journalists who believe that...



IRE Journalists Survey, Dec. 3 – 28, 2014. Q17 & Q18.

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Expecting Protection from Employers and ISPs

IRE journalists working for news organizations are evenly split on whether their employer is doing enough to protect them and their sources from things like surveillance and hacking. While 47% of these journalists say the organization they work for is doing enough to protect journalists and their sources, 50% say they are not doing enough.

About one-in-five respondents who work for a news organization (21%) say their employer has taken steps or changed policies in the past year to protect journalists from electronic surveillance and hacking, while 36% say their employer has not done this. Another 42% are not sure if their employer has taken any steps or changed any policies in this area.

Respondents' verbatim responses indicate that while some organizations appear to be doing a lot, others appear to be taking few, if any, steps. In a world of diminishing newsroom resources, some respondents say the issue has not risen to a level where it can be treated as a budgetary priority. Comments also show that while some journalists view these issues as being the responsibility of the IT department and something they do not pay much attention to, others are actively encouraging their organizations to improve.

A majority of IRE journalists have little or no confidence that their ISPs can protect their data. Just 2% of all journalists surveyed have "a lot of confidence" their ISP can protect their data from being accessed by unauthorized parties, with 27% having "some confidence." In contrast, 44% have "not much confidence," and another 26% have "no confidence at all."

Moreover, the vast majority of respondents (90%) believe their ISP would share their data with the U.S. government as part of standard National Security Agency (NSA) data gathering, and 97% believe their ISP would share their data if subpoenaed by the government as part of a criminal investigation.

More Than a Third of Investigative Journalists Feel Their Organization Has Not Taken Steps Against Surveillance and Hacking

Among IRE journalists who work in a news organization, % who feel their organization has ___ to protect them from surveillance & hacking



IRE Journalists Survey. Dec. 3 – 28, 2014. Q11. N=589.

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Majority of Journalists Believe ISP Would Share Their Data With the U.S. Government

% of IRE journalists who believe that their ISP would share their data with the U.S. government...



IRE Journalists Survey. Dec. 3 – 28, 2014. Q15 & Q16.

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Impact of Security Concerns on News Reporting

On the whole, few IRE journalists say concerns about surveillance and hacking have changed the stories or sources they pursue, but those who identify as reporters do feel an impact when it comes to their sources' willingness to share information.

Just 13% say concerns about surveillance and hacking have led them to not reach out to a particular source, and even fewer say concerns have led them to not pursue a particular story (3%) or to consider leaving investigative journalism (2%). In addition, only a quarter report being very (5%) or somewhat (18%) concerned that they or the organization they work for will lose a story to a journalist or organization with more sophisticated security measures, while the majority say they are not too (53%) or not at all (24%) concerned about this.

Reporters' Communications With Sources

Looking specifically at the cautions that some IRE reporters are taking provides a greater sense of the way communications with sources may, or may not, be changing. Roughly four-in-ten (38%) have, in the past year, at least somewhat changed the way they communicate with sources.

One-third of these reporters (33%) say that over the past year, it has become harder to find sources willing to go on the record, a term that means what the source says can be reported, published or aired.

There has been less impact on the willingness of sources to talk off the record, which means that what a source says may not be used for direct publication. About three quarters (74%) report no difference over the past year, while 8% say it has become easier, and 12% say it has become harder. These off-the-record sources are common today. Roughly four-in-ten IRE reporters (42%) use off-the-record sources in some of their stories they produce, and 19% use them in all or most.

When it comes to the specific actions journalists may or may

Meeting In Person Most Common Way to Protect Sources

% of IRE reporters who...

	Yes, started in past 12 months	Yes, for more than a year	No, do not do this
Meet in person instead of communicating by phone or email	11	48	33
Use encryption if communicating by email or IM	8	7	76
Turn off electronic devices if meeting a source in person	7	11	72
Avoid using third party email servers like Gmail	5	13	73
Communicate through fake email accounts or anonymous usernames	5	9	76
Use voice encryption if communicating by phone	2	1	87

IRE Journalists Survey, Dec. 3 - 28, 2014. Q20. N=454.

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not take to protect their sources, the most common technique by far – practiced among 59% of IRE reporters – is to meet them in person. That is followed by turning off electronic devices when meeting sources (18%), avoiding the use of third-party email servers when communicating with sources (17%), using email encryption (14%), using “fake” or anonymous email and online accounts (14%), and using voice encryption on phones (2%).

In most cases, there are more reporters who have used these techniques for more than a year than reporters who began using them within the last year. The exceptions are email encryption and voice encryption, which are fairly new tools and are only recently being adopted by IRE reporters.

IRE reporters age 40 and older are more likely than younger reporters to say it has become harder to find sources willing to go on the record (40% say this, compared with 29% of those under age 40). They are also more likely to meet sources in person (65% v. 55%), turn off electronic devices when meeting a source in person (23% v. 13%), and avoid using third party email servers when communicating with sources (23% v. 13%).

Adoption of Digital Security Tools

Beyond specific questions about how IRE reporters are communicating with their sources is a broader one: What kinds of steps are survey respondents taking to protect their own data, devices, and communications — not just with sources, but with each other? The survey finds that fully half (49%) of all respondents indicate that in the past year they have changed the way they share and store sensitive documents “a lot” (17%) or “some” (32%). Three-in-ten have changed the way they communicate with colleagues.

The survey asked about a range of practices these journalists might adopt, such as clearing their browser history, and then separately about a range of tools or software they might use to protect their digital privacy.

Half or more of all respondents said they engage in each of five specific practices asked about. The most commonly used technique is the simple step of using different passwords for different online accounts (91%), followed by changing privacy settings on social network sites (73%) and turning off the geolocation feature on mobile devices (67%). Most respondents who report using these approaches say they have done so for more than a year.

Using Different Passwords for Different Online Accounts Most Common Practice to Protect Digital Privacy

% of IRE journalists who...

	Yes, started in past 12 months	Yes, for more than a year	No, do not do this
Disable or turn off cookies	11	40	49
Regularly clear your browser history	13	51	36
Use different passwords for different online accounts	15	76	8
Turn off the geolocation feature on mobile devices, apps or social media platforms	18	48	33
Use enhanced privacy settings on social media sites like Facebook or Twitter	14	58	27

IRE Journalists Survey, Dec. 3 – 28, 2014. Q13.

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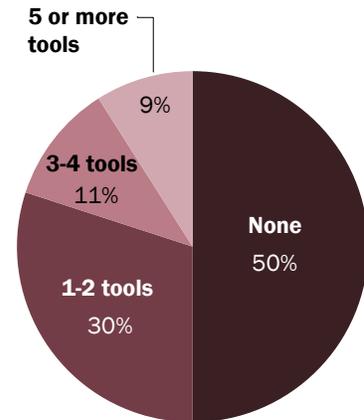
Usage of specific tools and software is less common.

Respondents were asked about eight different tools they could employ on their home or work computers, tablets or cellphones, as well as whether they had adopted them recently. While we do not list these tools individually due to concerns expressed by those surveyed, they included everything from turning off geolocation on mobile devices to using email encryption or privacy-enhanced search engines.²

Half of respondents (50%) do not employ any of the eight measures on their personal or work-issued devices, while just one-in-ten (9%) employ five or more. Three-in-ten (30%) employ one or two.

Use of Digital Security Tools Varies

% of IRE journalists who use ___ of the eight security tools asked about



IRE Journalists Survey. Dec. 3 – 28, 2014. Q24, Q25.

Note: Journalists who work for a news organization were asked about eight security tools, for both their personal and work-issued devices. Those who do not work for a news organization were just asked about their personal devices.

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² Due to concerns expressed by some in the survey population, the Pew Research Center has agreed to refrain from publishing specific, detailed data about individual tools or software used by IRE members, and instead uses summary calculations to convey trends.

Journalist Training and Knowledge About Digital Security

Overall, fewer than half (41%) of IRE journalists have received training or instruction from outside sources about ways to protect themselves and their sources.

The most common source of training for this group is a journalism conference or seminar. Nearly one-third (30%) say they have learned about digital security from this type of training. That compares with just 15% who say they have received training or instruction from a news organization they work for or have worked for in the past. Fewer than one-in-ten investigative journalists (4%) have received training or instruction about these issues in journalism school.

Outside of any formal training, these investigative journalists report spending little time conducting research on their own about digital security. When asked how much time they've spent over the past year researching what they can do to secure their communications, the majority of journalists (73%) say they have spent not much time or no time at all. About a quarter (23%) have spent some time doing so, and just 3% say they spend a great deal of time.

Despite the apparent dearth of training and information, most respondents claim to have at least some familiarity with key tech security concepts:

- 77% are familiar with what constitutes “metadata”
- 76% are familiar with the difference between HTTP and HTTPS sites
- 65% are familiar with proxy servers
- 59% are familiar with two-factor authentication
- 37% are familiar with digital threat modeling

As one might expect, some of the highest levels of familiarity with these concepts are reported by journalists who cover science and technology, as well as by those who cover national security, foreign affairs or the federal government.

Science and Tech Reporters Have Higher Levels of Familiarity With Key Tech Terms

% of each group who are “very familiar” with...

	Total	Science/tech reporters
The difference between http and https sites	44	58
Two factor authentication	35	47
What constitutes “metadata”	30	41
Proxy servers	19	30
Digital threat modeling	8	16

IRE Journalists Survey, Dec. 3 – 28, 2014. Q32. Science/tech reporters (N=116).

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Heightened Concerns Among National Government/Security/Foreign Affairs Journalists

As noted earlier, many IRE journalists perceive issues of digital security — particularly stemming from government surveillance programs — as a serious concern mainly for journalists who cover national security, foreign affairs or the federal government. Survey data confirm this perception to some degree, with journalists working in these sensitive national and international areas expressing more concern about their digital security and making more behavioral changes in response to recent events than other journalists. Throughout this section of the report, this group is referred to as “national government/foreign affairs” journalists.

Of the 671 survey participants, 164 are journalists who focus on national security, foreign affairs and/or the federal government. Among this group, 71% believe the government has collected data about their phone calls, emails and other online communications. That is higher than the 62% of IRE journalists covering other topics who believe their data has been collected as part of government surveillance programs.

These national government/foreign affairs journalists are also more likely than others to have changed their behaviors in the past year with regard to how they store potentially sensitive documents and how they communicate with colleagues.

They are also more likely to have spent time in the past year researching digital security, and are more likely to be adopters of a wide variety of security enhancement tools.

More than four-in-ten national government/foreign affairs journalists rank surveillance as the Number one or number two challenge for their profession among four different challenges asked

National Gov't/Security/Foreign Affairs Journalists Stand Apart From Others

% of each group who...

	National gov't/security/foreign affairs journalists	Other journalists
Have changed “a lot” or “some” in the past year how they store or share potentially sensitive documents	58	46
Have changed “a lot” or “some” in the past year how they communicate with other reporters, editors, or producers	39	26
Rank surveillance as the No. 1 or No. 2 challenge for journalists (out of four challenges listed)	45	27
Use at least five of the eight security tools listed	16	7
Are very or somewhat concerned they could lose a story to a journalist or organization with more sophisticated security measures	33	19
Have spent at least some time in the past year researching how to secure communications	35	24

IRE Journalists Survey. Dec. 3 – 28, 2014. Q9, Q4, Q13, Q24, Q25, Q12, Q30. Nat'l gov't/security/foreign affairs journalists (N=164). Other journalists (N=507).

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about. And one-third worry about losing a story to a competitor with more advanced digital security protocols in place. In both cases, fewer investigative journalists who deal with other topics express these concerns.

And among the national government/foreign affairs journalists who work for a news organization, 58% tend to feel their organizations are not doing enough to protect journalists and their sources from surveillance and hacking, compared with 48% among other investigative journalists who work for a news organization.

Reporters Who Cover National Security, Foreign Affairs and Government

Of the 164 national government/foreign affairs journalists surveyed, 111 identify themselves specifically as reporters. This group was asked a range of questions that pertain especially to their circumstances.

This group is more likely than other IRE reporters to employ the following measures to protect their sources' identities: turning off electronic devices when meeting sources in person, using email encryption, using phone encryption, and communicating with sources through "fake" or anonymous email accounts, online profiles or chat room identities. At the same time, they are more likely than other reporters (18% vs. 10%) to say it has gotten harder in the past 12 months to find sources willing to speak off the record.

Looking back over the past year, these reporters are also more likely than other investigative reporters surveyed to have changed the way they communicate with sources and in how they use the internet to research stories.

National Gov't/Security/Foreign Affairs Reporters Stand Apart From Others

% of each group who...

	Nat'l gov't/ security/foreign affairs reporters	Other reporters
Turn off electronic devices when meeting with sources in person	29	14
Use email encryption when communicating with sources	30	9
Communicate through "fake" or anonymous email accounts, online profiles, or chat room identities	22	11
Use voice encryption when communicating with sources	8	1
Say it has become somewhat harder or much harder in the past 12 months to find sources willing to speak off-the-record	18	10
Have changed "a lot" or "some" in the past year how they communicate with sources	46	35
Have changed "a lot" or "some" in the past year how they use the internet to research stories	34	18

IRE Journalists Survey. Dec. 3–28, 2014. Q20, Q22, Q9. Nat'l gov't/security/foreign affairs reporters (N=111). Other reporters (N=343).

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Weighing Surveillance Against Other Concerns

Despite concern expressed by some respondents about the potential impact of government data collection programs and criminal hacking, other issues clearly outweigh surveillance for the bulk of these journalists.

IRE journalists were presented with a list of four challenges facing today's journalists and asked to rank them in order from the biggest challenge to the smallest. Of these four choices, the vast majority of respondents (88%) place "decreasing resources in newsrooms" at the top of the list. None of the other options was named as the top priority by more than 5% of these journalists.

Legal action against journalists was most commonly named as a second place priority; 56% place it second. And while just 4% see electronic surveillance as the biggest of these challenges, another 28% place it second on their list. Most revealing, 61% of respondents rank hacking of journalists or news organizations as the smallest challenge of the four, making it the clear lowest priority.

To underscore these findings, nearly all of these investigative journalists (97%) say that the benefits of digital communications like email and cellphones outweigh the risks. This belief cuts across all subgroups of respondents. Even among respondents whose own work has been impacted by concerns about electronic surveillance and hacking, just 7% say the risks posed by digital technologies outweigh the benefits.

Decreasing Newsroom Resources Ranks as Biggest Challenge Facing Journalists Today

% of IRE journalists who rank each of the following as biggest or second biggest challenge facing journalism today

	Biggest Challenge	Second Biggest Challenge
Decreasing resources in newsrooms	88	5
Legal action against journalists	5	56
Electronic surveillance by gov't, corps & other entities	4	28
Hackers targeting journalists or news orgs	1	8

IRE Journalists Survey, Dec. 3 -28, 2014. Q4.

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Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on an online survey conducted from December 3 – 28, 2014, among a representative sample of 671 journalists who are members of Investigative Reporters and Editors Inc. (IRE). The survey was written and analyzed by Pew Research Center staff, and field work was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI). The report was produced in association with Columbia University’s Tow Center for Digital Journalism.

The universe of potential respondents for this study was defined as investigative journalists in the United States who are members of Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE). Founded in 1975, IRE is a nonprofit association “dedicated to improving the quality of investigative reporting,” according to its website. For the purpose of this study, the total member list was filtered, and members who were not based in the United States, or who did not identify themselves as practicing journalists (educators or students, for instance) were excluded from further sampling. After an initial list of domestic, practicing journalists was pulled (a total of 2,734 records) from the IRE database, eleven records were removed because they had no email address, were based outside of the United States or contained generic contact information for an unnamed respondent. No sampling was done among the remaining 2,723 records. All domestic, practicing investigative journalists were asked to participate in the study. The overall response rate was 24.6%.

On December 1, 2014, each journalist with a postal address was sent a postcard in the mail explaining the purpose of the study and encouraging the journalist’s participation. Following the postcards, all requests for participation were sent by email. On December 3, all members were sent email invitations with individualized survey links to access the online study [N=2,723]. Email reminders were sent to all non-responders on December 10 [N=2,438] and December 17 [N=2,247]. Journalists also had the option of returning a print version of the survey through the mail. The survey was conducted in English.

The 671 investigative journalists includes a mix of reporters, producers, editors, data specialists, photojournalists and others, and comprises a wide range of coverage areas — a mix of national, local and international, including (but not limited to) government and politics; crime and law enforcement; national security; foreign affairs; education; the environment; business; and science and technology. According to the survey, a majority of respondents (88%) say they work for a news organization, as opposed to freelancing. One-in-five (21%) cover primarily *national* news, and 63% cover mainly *local* news; the remainder cover international news (3%) or report no geographic focus to their work (12%). The sample includes a mix of new, mid-career and veteran journalists and is evenly divided between those under age 40 (49%) and those age 40 and older (49%).

To assess representativeness of these 671 journalists against the total population surveyed (2,723), a series of tests were conducted based on available, anonymized membership data on both groups (a different source of member information than the survey itself). First, the groups were sorted by employment status: Among respondents, 92% listed a specific organization as their employer, while the remainder were either listed as “independent” or had a blank field (among the total population, 93% listed a specific organization as their employer). Second, the state of residence for each member was tallied and sorted. Out of the top 10 states listed for each group, nine were the same for both respondents and non-respondents (California, New York, the District of Columbia, Florida, Texas, Illinois, Virginia, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania). Third, members were sorted by region of the country and density of the city they listed — the differences between those of respondents and non-respondents were not significant. Fourth, members’ employers were classified into categories and assessed for frequency. Among the group of respondents, print-based organizations were the most frequently listed, at 47%, followed by broadcast (24%), ‘Other’ (19%) and wire services (3%). Independent journalists or blank fields accounted for 8%. Among the total population, print was also the most frequently listed, at 43%, followed by broadcast (29%), ‘Other’ (17%), and wire services (4%). Independent journalists or blank fields accounted for 7%. Finally, aggregate data on one demographic characteristic — sex — was compared between the group of respondents and the entire IRE membership. Among all IRE members who completed this field (including international and student/academic members), 56% are male and 44% are female. Among respondents (which do not include international or student/academics), 55% are male and 45% are female.

The margin of error for all respondents [N = 671] is plus or minus 3.8 percentage points. Sample sizes and sampling errors for subgroups are available upon request.