

Behind the Byline: Voices From Environmental Journalism



SOCIETY OF
ENVIRONMENTAL
JOURNALISTS

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Foreword

Journalism is at an unpredictable crossroads today: adapting in response to many audiences getting their information from non-news sources, while simultaneously fighting to build and retain trust, especially among the least served and most underreported communities. These pressures feel even more urgent on the environmental beat as newsrooms still remain unrepresentative of our nation and provide minimal support for environmental journalists of color.

In an era when diversity is under attack, the timing of this report could not be more relevant or compelling. As a first for Green 2.0 and SEJ, the findings from the Behind the Byline: Voices from Environmental Journalism Report benchmark where our industry and newsrooms stand, and perhaps, more significantly, highlight the stories underlying the data — individual journalists grappling with bias, burnout and limited advancement. By sharing and amplifying their experiences, we aim to spark stronger accountability and progress that leads to lasting change. Simply reporting the facts of our environmental challenges is no longer enough. To serve all communities, especially those on the frontlines of climate change, our commitment to inclusive newsrooms must be as urgent as the climate emergency itself.

Introduction

According to a 2023 Pew Research study,¹ environmental journalism lacks representation that accurately reflects our nation's population, which provides a critical first step in identifying the current state of environmental journalism. To deepen the collective understanding of the sector's demographics and the unique experiences of environmental journalists of color (EJOCs), Green 2.0 collected data through two different surveys. The first, the Newsroom Demographics: Environmental Journalism Survey, was distributed to news outlets to collect the demographic data of their environmental journalists. The second, the Experiences of Journalists of Color Survey, was distributed to environmental journalists of color to assess whether they agreed or disagreed with statements about feeling valued and supported in their newsrooms. The statements also asked about experiences of discrimination and retention in the sector.

This Behind the Byline: Voices From Environmental Journalism report synthesizes these two surveys and focuses on the qualitative data of EJOCs to emphasize the importance of personal experiences and contextualize the demographic data. Providing individuals a platform to transparently share their lived experiences humanizes big picture trends in environmental journalism. Understanding how systemic issues affect journalists can help the sector better understand how they can address and solve these issues.

Existing research clearly demonstrates the benefits of diversity and inclusion in the workforce in general and within the journalism sector.²⁻⁵ Research also demonstrates that environmental and climate issues negatively affect individuals at different intersections of their identities, and that certain communities are especially vulnerable.⁶ These communities include people of color, low-income individuals and families, children, caretakers, women, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQIA+ community, to highlight a few.⁷⁻⁹ Stories written by and about these communities and their unique relation to the environment should be better represented amongst environmental journalists who share their lived experiences.

Despite this research, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at organizations are under attack, in part because of pervasive disinformation surrounding what these efforts are and how their practices are utilized.* This diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice work is more vital now than ever, especially as data shows that workplace discrimination still greatly harms people of color (POC).^{10,11} The Behind the Byline: Voices From Environmental Journalism report focuses on understanding experiences of environmental journalists of color specifically for this reason. Understanding how to support EJOCs at the intersection of all their other identities can help this sector create an environment that allows journalists of all backgrounds to show up as their full selves within the workplace. This will ultimately improve the sector for all journalists and thus improve the efficacy of environmental journalism as a whole.

**To learn more, please see our [Dispelling Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Myths](#) document here.*

Notes on Demographic Categories, Terms, and Processes

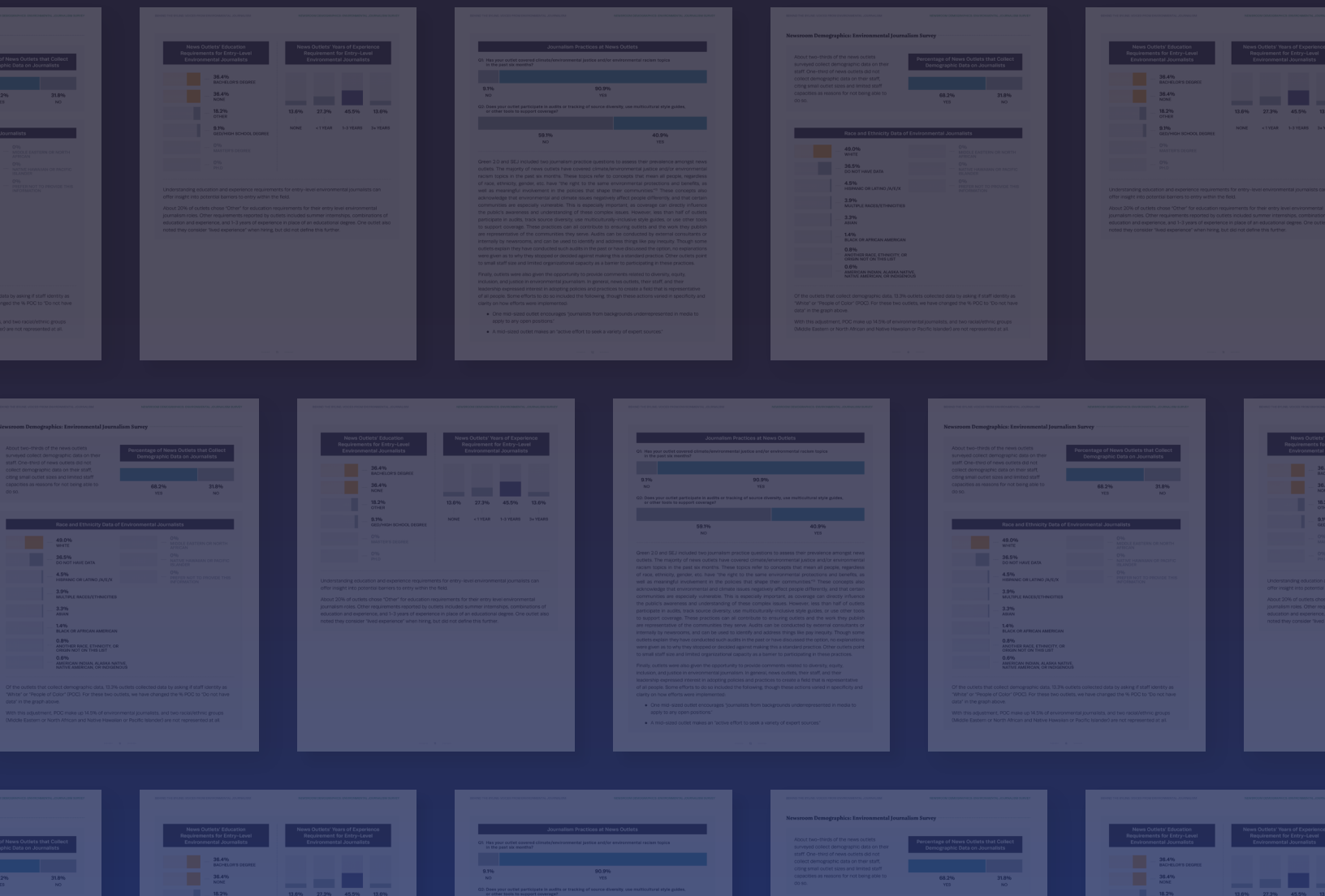
Terms

- Environmental journalist is defined as a journalist who covers environmental, climate, or weather/ meteorology topics at least 10% of the time.
- Diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice are all terms that refer to creating organizations that are made up of a variety of people of different identities and ensuring that all people are treated fairly regardless of their background.
 - Diversity is defined as a range of differences across multiple identities, while equity refers to taking into account differences in order to ensure people are treated fairly. Inclusion describes an environment in which all people feel valued and supported with respect to their identities. Justice involves removing any barriers to create and sustain workplaces that are diverse, equitable, and inclusive.¹²
- We use the terms woman and man in this report in a way that is inclusive of individuals who are transgender and cisgender.
- This report includes “queer” as an individual demographic category option for sexual orientation. We use the term “LGBTQIA+” to refer to non-heterosexual people. We recognize LGBTQIA+ is an imperfect stand in for representing sexual orientation identity as it also includes gender expansive identities.

Demographic Categories and Processes

- In many locales, the mere act of reporting LGBTQIA+ and gender expansive identities can introduce risk on a social, career, psychological, or physical level, with staff navigating potential loss of community, medical care, and/or housing. Therefore, our data may not accurately represent LGBTQIA+ or gender expansive identities given the inherent risks that come with coming out in certain jurisdictions.
- In many organizations, staff reporting their disabilities can pose direct, significant personal and professional risks, including loss of health insurance and advancement opportunities. Therefore, this data may not accurately represent the actual disability status data of staff.
- It is critical for organizations to be inclusive of all communities in their reporting. As best practice, we recommend including the demographic category of Middle Eastern or North African as noted in [Green 2.0's Guide to Best Practices in Demographic Data Collection](#).
- Green 2.0 also recommends including individual gender expansive identities and sexual orientations as they exist outside a binary and heteronormative structure, rather than grouping them all together within an LGBTQIA+ umbrella. This is a best practice noted in [Green 2.0's Guide to Best Practices in Demographic Data Collection](#). Unfortunately, some organizations we survey do not collect or report data on these categories. This is a missed opportunity to represent the varied experiences within the LGBTQIA+ community and to represent the nuanced intersections of sexual orientation and gender.

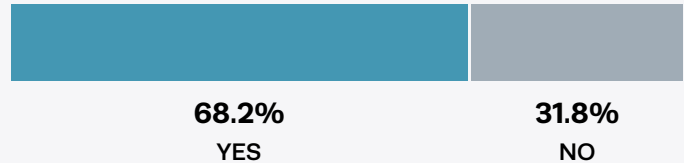
Newsroom Demographics: Environmental Journalism Survey



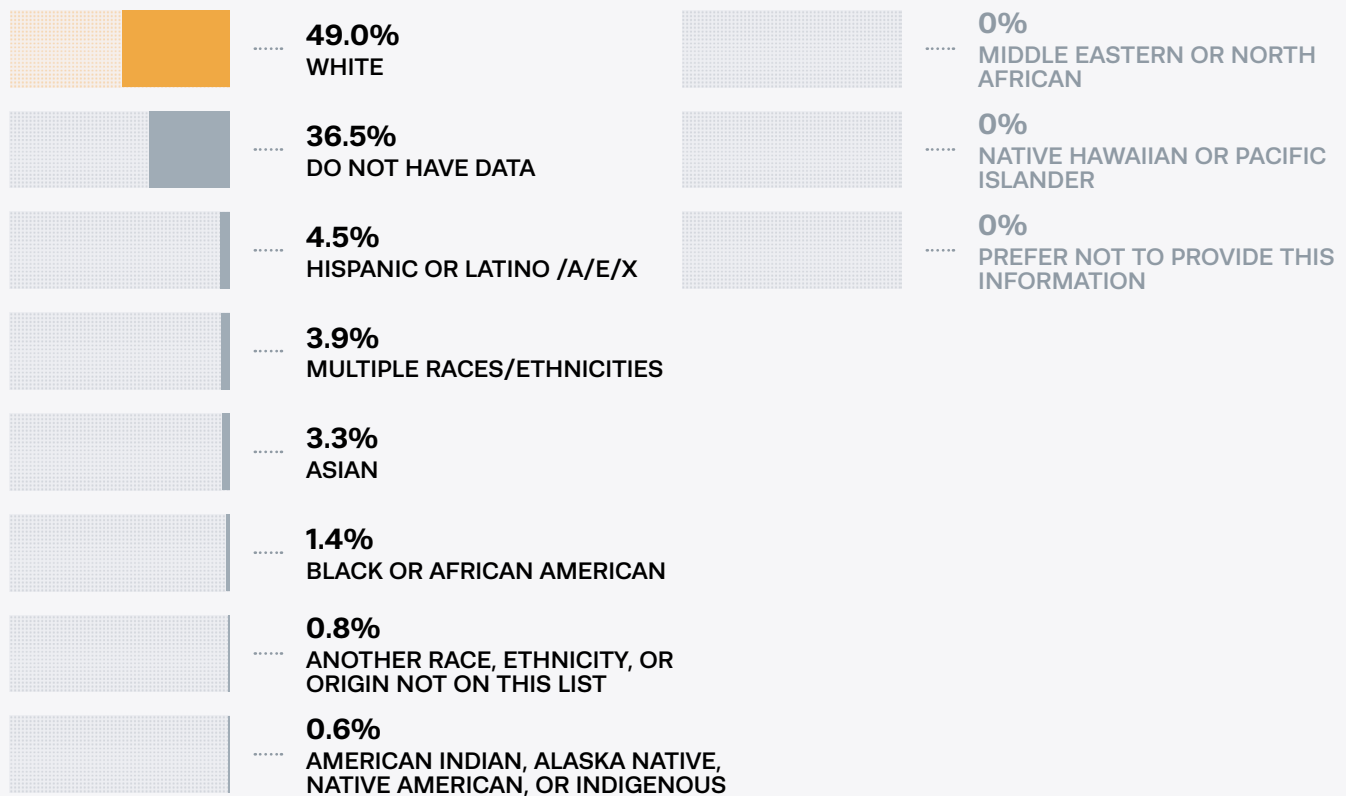
Newsroom Demographics: Environmental Journalism Survey

About two-thirds of the news outlets surveyed collect demographic data on their staff. One-third of news outlets did not collect demographic data on their staff, citing small outlet sizes and limited staff capacities as reasons for not being able to do so.

Percentage of News Outlets that Collect Demographic Data on Journalists



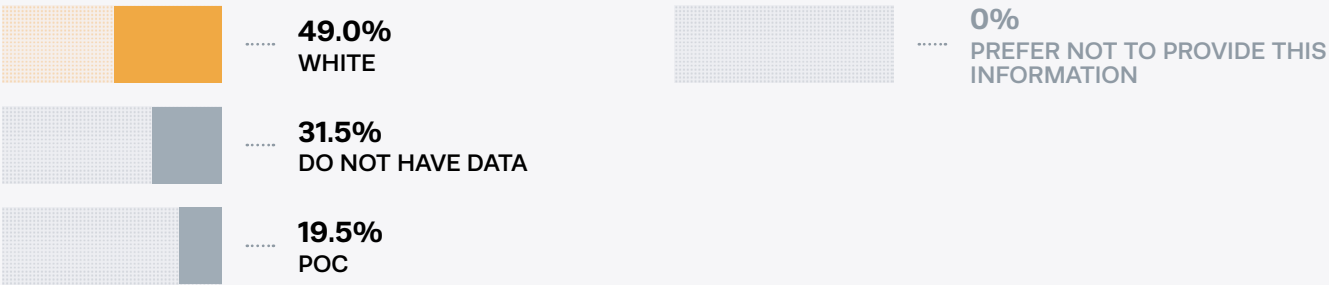
Race and Ethnicity Data of Environmental Journalists



Of the outlets that collect demographic data, 13.3% outlets collected data by asking if staff identity as "White" or "People of Color" (POC). Since it is unclear how these outlets defined "White" and "People of Color," we did not want to make assumptions and skew the data in this graph, so for these outlets, we changed the % POC to "Do not have data" in the graph above.

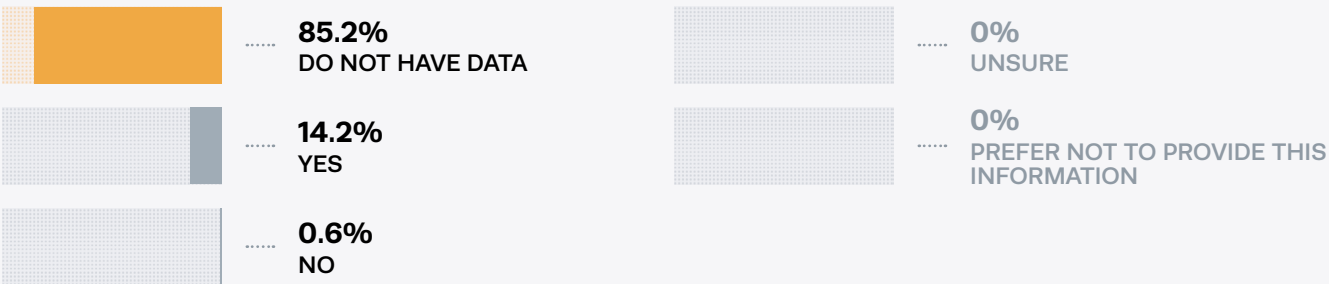
With this adjustment, POC make up 14.5% of environmental journalists, and two racial/ethnic groups (Middle Eastern or North African and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander) are not represented at all.

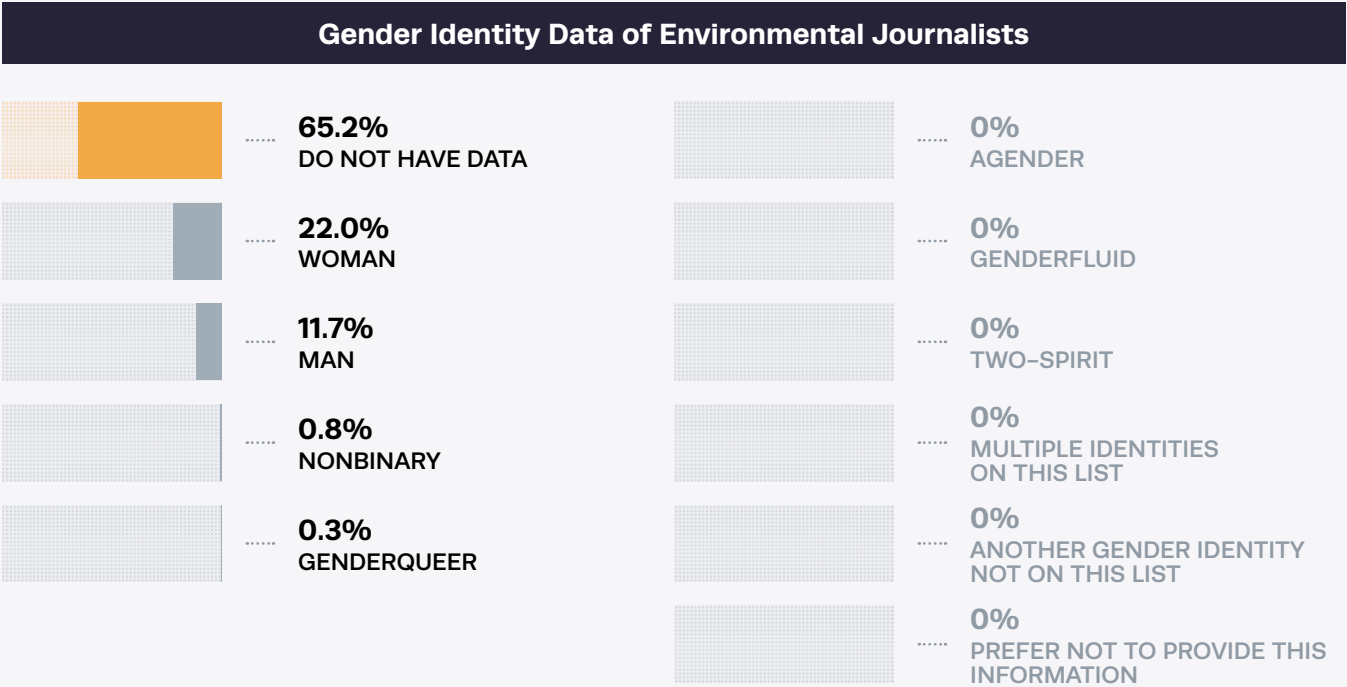
Environmental Journalists Identifying as People of Color



Including data for all outlets and combining all races/ethnicities under “POC” yields a slightly higher percent of environmental journalists of color, 19.5% versus 14.5% in the previous graph.

Do Environmental Journalists identify with Their Gender Assigned at Birth?





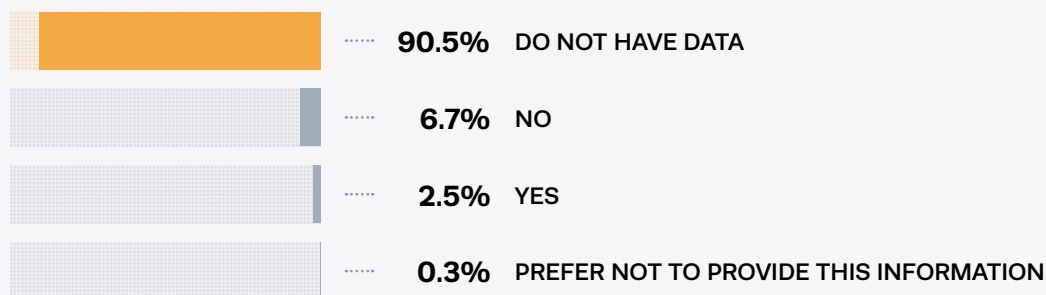
Though almost two-thirds of the data is missing for gender identity of environmental journalists, of the data reported, the majority identify as women. There are twice as many women as there are men who are environmental journalists. Though many gender identities are not represented, about 1% of environmental journalists reported having gender expansive identities.



Of the outlets that collect demographic data, 6.6% collected data by asking if staff identify as “belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community.” Since it is unclear how these outlets defined “belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community,” we did not want to make assumptions and skew the data in this graph. Thus, for these outlets, we have changed the percentage of LGBTQIA+ staff to “Do not have data” in the graph above.

The large majority of sexual orientation data is missing. Of the existing data, the majority of environmental journalists identify as heterosexual/straight, with less than 1% identifying as members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

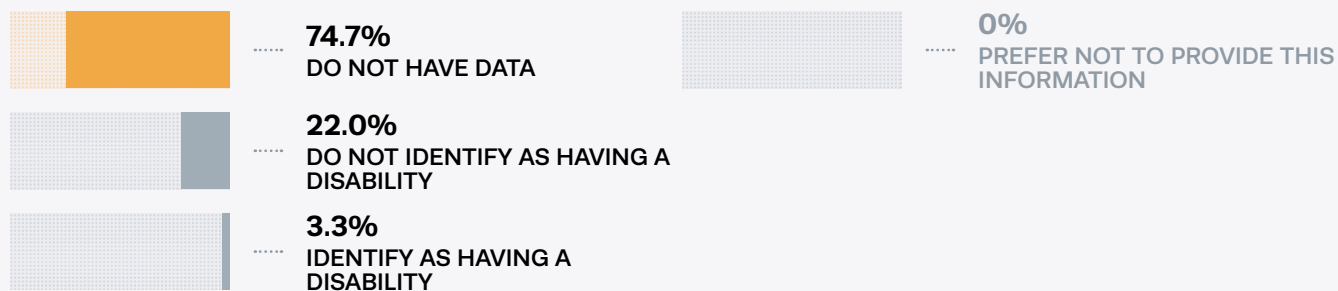
Environmental Journalists Identifying as Part of the LGBTQIA+ Community

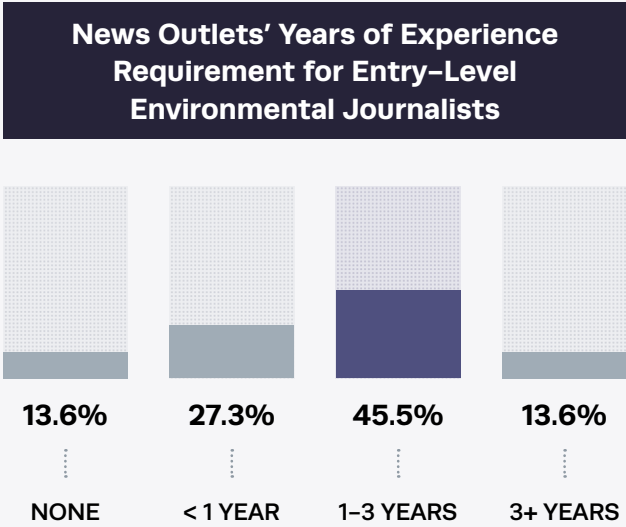
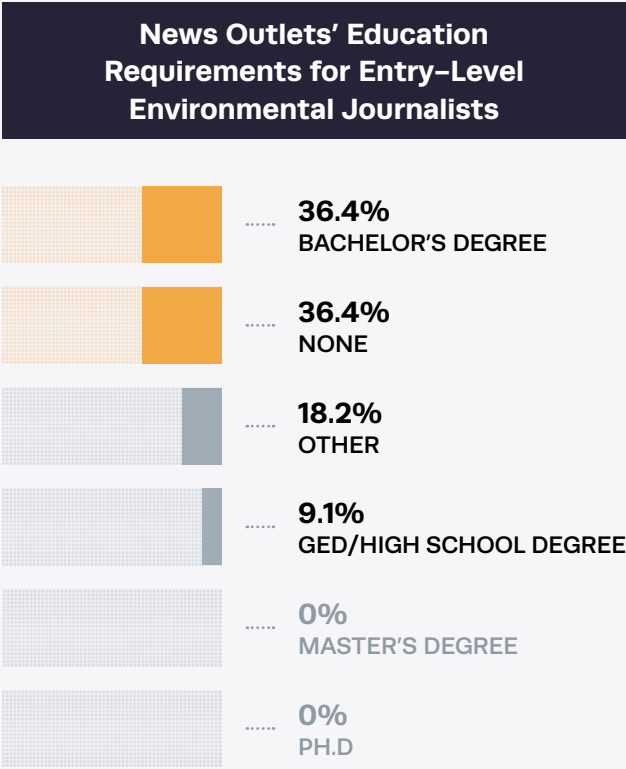


For this graph, data for all outlets was included and all LGBTQIA+ identities were grouped under "Yes," while all "Heterosexual/Straight" were grouped under "No."

The percentage of environmental journalists who identify as belonging to part of the LGBTQIA+ community is relatively higher at 2.5% when compared to less than 1% in the previous graph.

Disability Status Data of Environmental Journalists



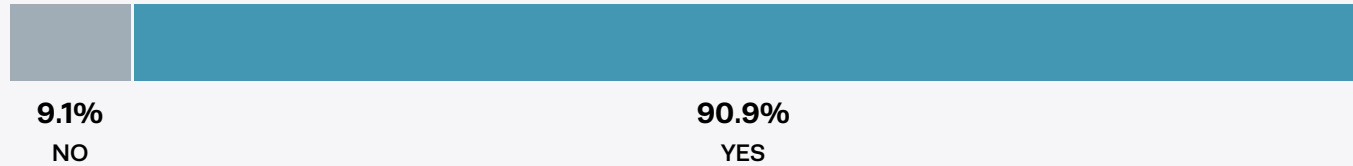


Understanding education and experience requirements for entry-level environmental journalists can offer insight into potential barriers to entry within the field.

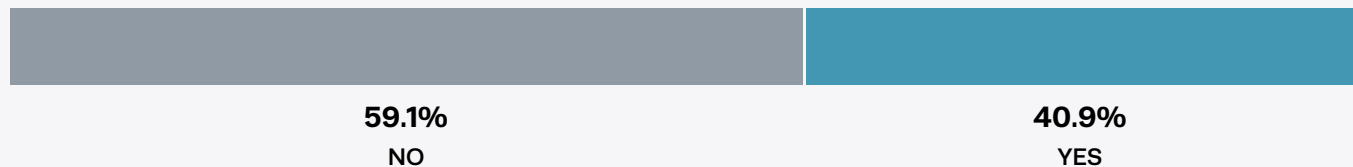
About 20% of outlets chose “Other” for education requirements for their entry level environmental journalism roles. Other requirements reported by outlets included summer internships, combinations of education and experience, and 1–3 years of experience in place of an educational degree. One outlet also noted they consider “lived experience” when hiring, but did not define this further.

Journalism Practices at News Outlets

Q1: Has your outlet covered climate/environmental justice and/or environmental racism topics in the past six months?



Q2: Does your outlet participate in audits or tracking of source diversity, use multicultural style guides, or other tools to support coverage?



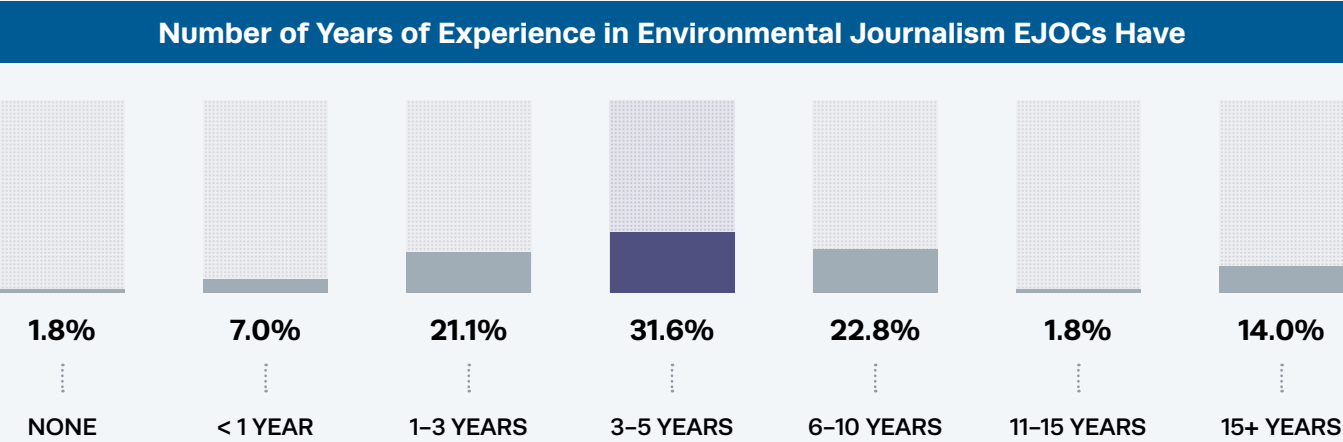
Green 2.0 and SEJ included two journalism practice questions to assess their prevalence amongst news outlets. The majority of news outlets have covered climate/environmental justice and/or environmental racism topics in the past six months. These topics refer to concepts that mean all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, etc. have “the right to the same environmental protections and benefits, as well as meaningful involvement in the policies that shape their communities.”¹³ These concepts also acknowledge that environmental and climate issues negatively affect people differently, and that certain communities are especially vulnerable. This is especially important, as coverage can directly influence the public’s awareness and understanding of these complex issues. However, less than half of outlets participate in audits, track source diversity, use multiculturally-inclusive style guides, or use other tools to support coverage. These practices can all contribute to ensuring outlets and the work they publish are representative of the communities they serve. Audits can be conducted by external consultants or internally by newsrooms, and can be used to identify and address things like pay inequity. Though some outlets explain they have conducted such audits in the past or have discussed the option, no explanations were given as to why they stopped or decided against making this a standard practice. Other outlets point to small staff size and limited organizational capacity as a barrier to participating in these practices.

Finally, outlets were also given the opportunity to provide comments related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in environmental journalism. In general, news outlets, their staff, and their leadership expressed interest in adopting policies and practices to create a field that is representative of all people. Some efforts to do so included the following, though these actions varied in specificity and clarity on how efforts were implemented:

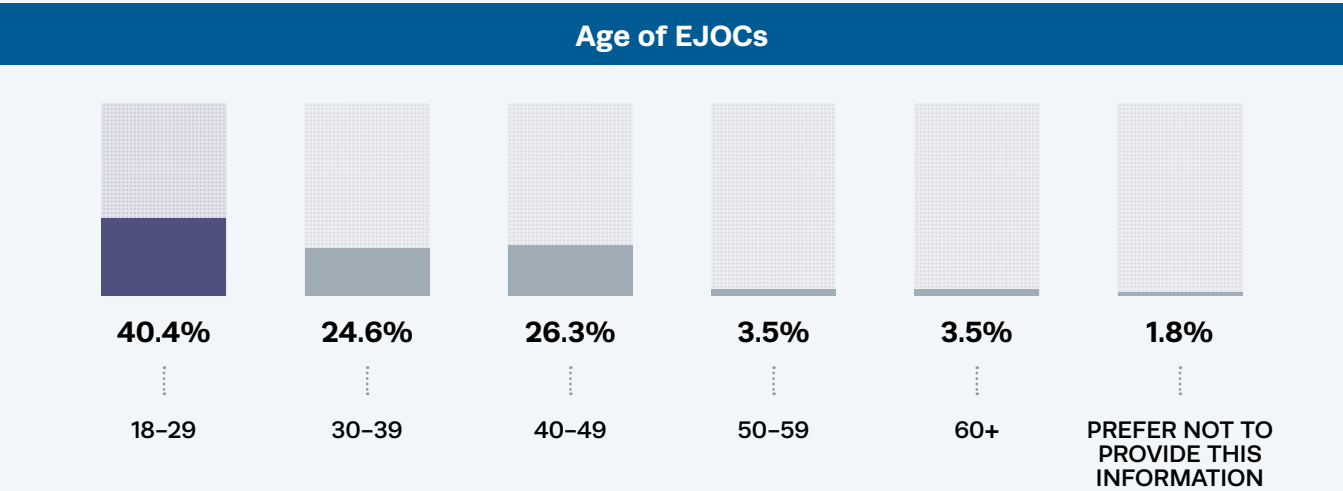
- One mid-sized outlet encourages “journalists from backgrounds underrepresented in media to apply to any open positions.”
- A mid-sized outlet makes an “active effort to seek a variety of expert sources.”

Experiences of Environmental Journalists of Color Survey

Understanding the experiences of environmental journalists of color (EJOCs) is essential to identifying and addressing issues related to the sector’s inclusion of different perspectives that are representative of all communities affected by environmental issues. These experiences offer a more in-depth understanding that in combination with understanding outlet demographic information can create a more holistic picture of environmental journalism.

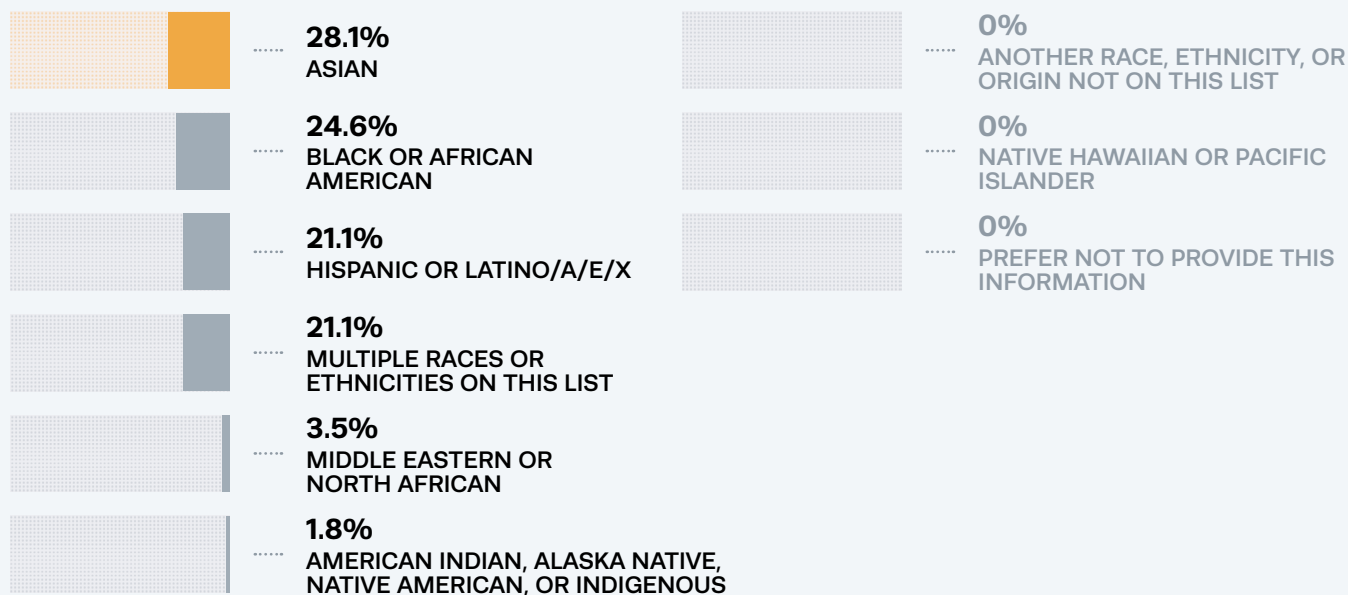


The majority of environmental journalists of color (75%) had 1-10 years of experience in environmental journalism.



The majority of environmental journalists of color (91%) were between 18-39 years old. Less than 10% were age 50 or older.

Race and Ethnicity of EJOs

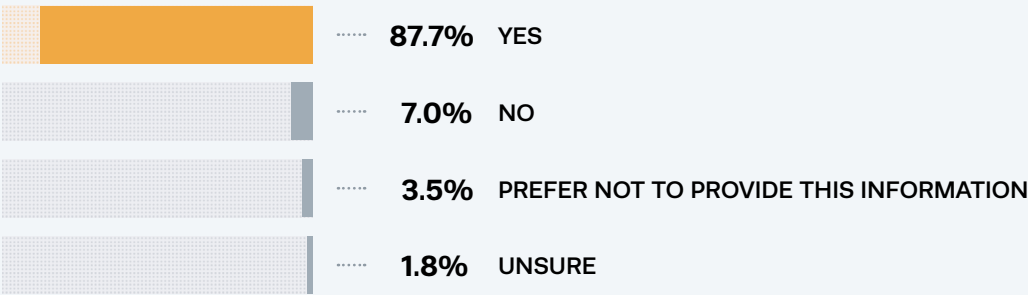


Of the journalists who identified as multiple races or ethnicities, the following ethnicities were represented amongst journalists of multiracial/ethnic identities:

- American Indian, Alaska Native, Native American, or Indigenous
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino/a/e/x
- Middle Eastern or North African
- White

Though it is a small percentage, Middle Eastern or North African people are represented in this survey despite not being represented in the first newsroom one. However, for both surveys, the Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander group was not represented.

Do EJOs Identify With Their Gender Assigned at Birth?



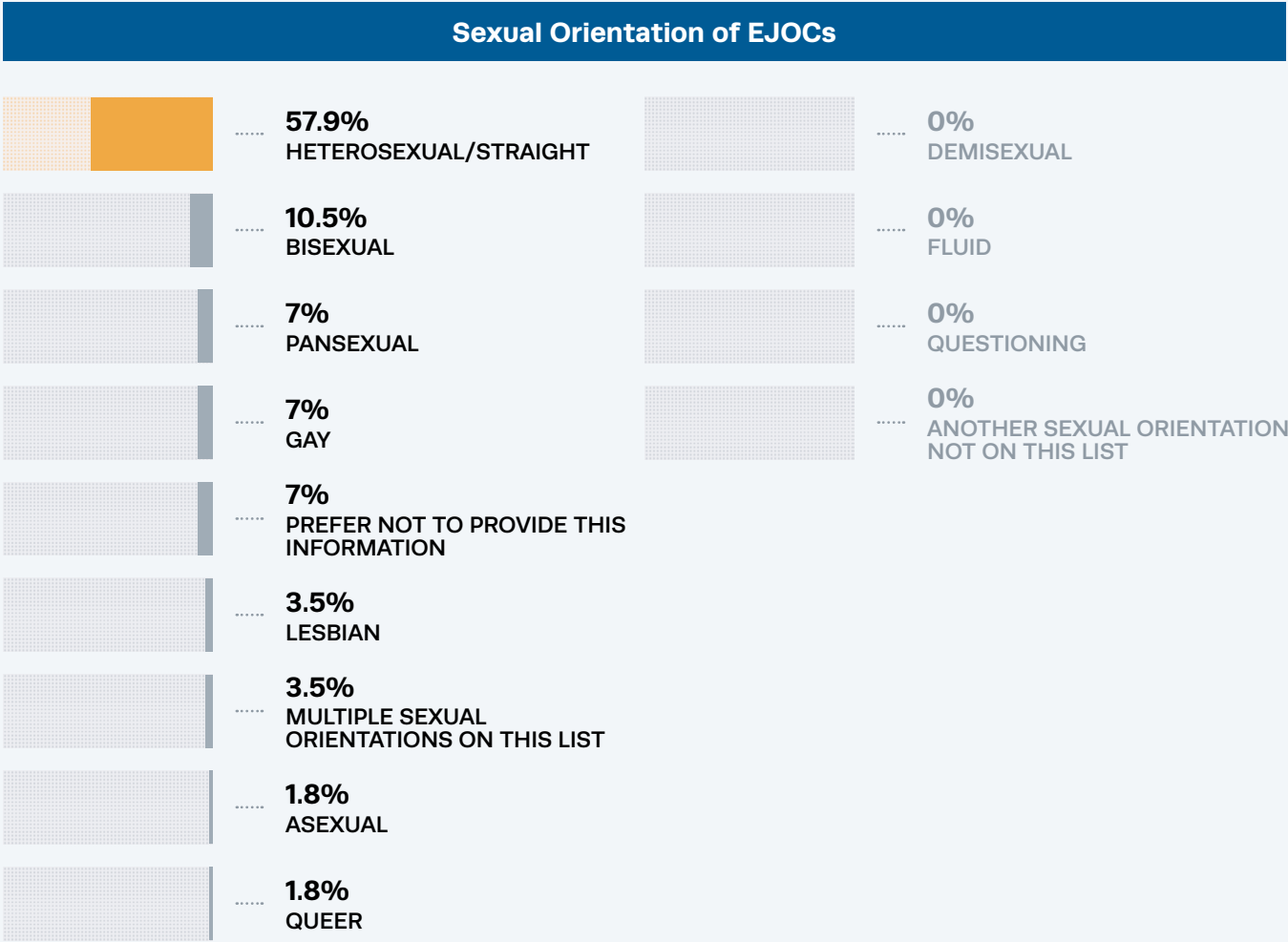
There was a greater percentage of transgender people represented (7%) in this survey as compared to the first one for news outlets, which was only 0.6%.

Gender Identity of EJOs



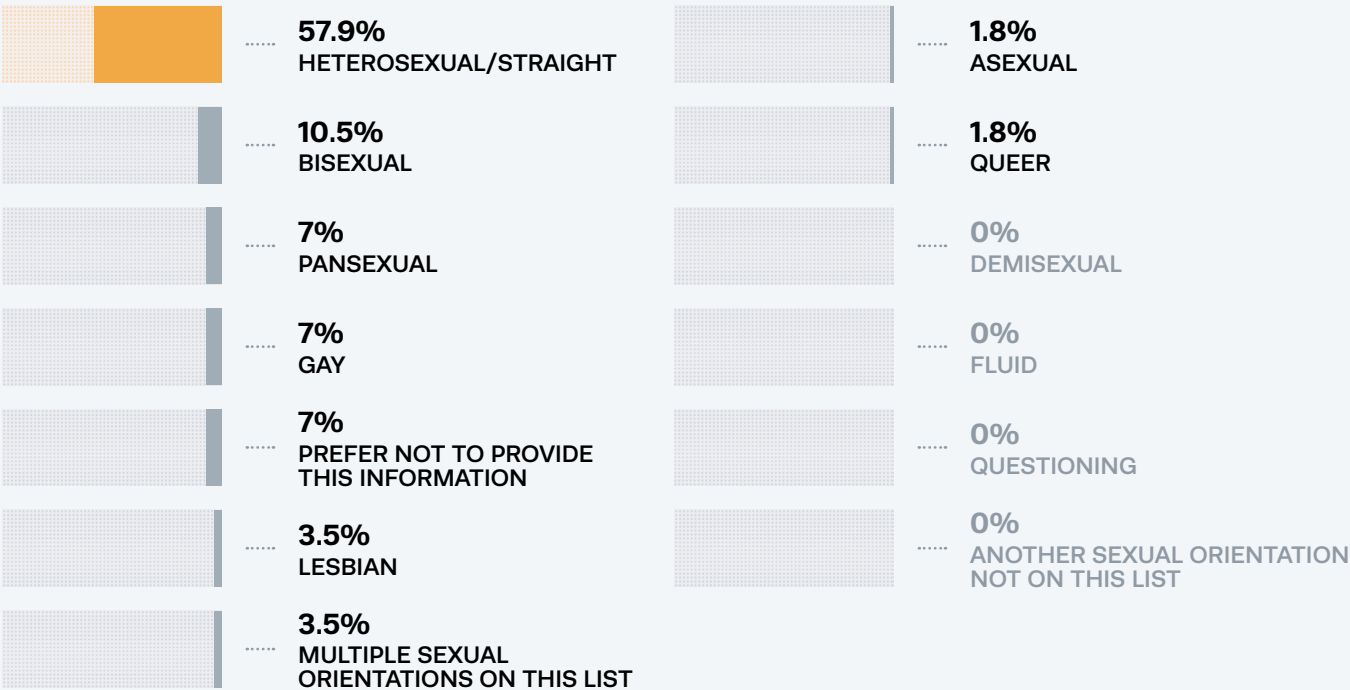
Though the majority of environmental journalists of color identify as women, about 7% identify as gender expansive. This percentage is much higher relative to the 1.1% of people who identified as gender expansive at news outlets in the first survey.

In the survey for news outlets, there were twice as many women as men employed at news outlets. However, in this survey, the percentage is even greater, meaning three times as many women responded to our survey for EJOs as men.



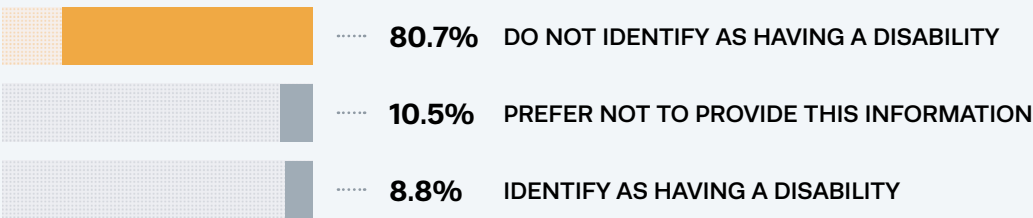
Though the majority of environmental journalists of color identify as heterosexual/straight, 35% identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community. This number is substantially higher for EJOCs in this survey than amongst environmental journalists in the Newsroom Demographics survey, where only 2.5% of environmental journalists at news outlets identified as belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Sexual Orientation of EJOCs



Though the majority of environmental journalists of color identify as heterosexual/straight, 35% identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community. This number is substantially higher for EJOCs in this survey than amongst environmental journalists in the Newsroom Demographics survey, where only 2.5% of environmental journalists at news outlets identified as belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Disability Status of EJOCs



The percent of people who identified as having a disability was almost three times greater amongst EJOCs in this survey at 8.8% than amongst environmental journalists at outlets in the first survey at 3%.

EJOCs Sliding Scale Questions

Understanding demographics of news outlets and EJOCs can offer an important and objective source of information when assessing if the field is representative of all communities. We also asked EJOCs sliding scale questions to gather data on daily experiences.

In order to capture a variety of aspects of EJOCs experiences, these questions were asked on a scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree and cover four topics: 1) Value, 2) Support, 3) Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice and 4) Entrance and Retention.

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As for whether my perspective as a person of color is valued, I would more likely say that it is seen as valuable. It is valuable that I speak Spanish and English, for example, but it is not something where I often see support.

— EJOC identity as Hispanic or Latino/a/e/x

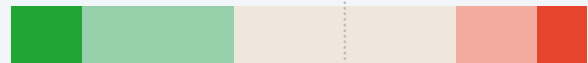
Do EJOCs Agree with the Following Statements Regarding Value?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree N/A

Q1: I feel that my news outlet(s) value my contributions to the field.



Q2: My perspective as a person of color is valued.



Q3: I make a liveable income in my current career.



Q1:	19.3% STRONGLY AGREE	43.9% AGREE	12.3% NEUTRAL	14.0% DISAGREE	8.8% STRONGLY DISAGREE	1.8% N/A
Q2:	12.3% STRONGLY AGREE	26.3% AGREE	38.6% NEUTRAL	14.0% DISAGREE	8.8% STRONGLY DISAGREE	0% N/A
Q3:	14.0% STRONGLY AGREE	28.1% AGREE	14.0% NEUTRAL	24.6% DISAGREE	17.5% STRONGLY DISAGREE	1.8% N/A

About two-thirds of surveyed EJOCs feel their general contributions are valued by their outlets, but only about 40% of EJOCs feel that their perspective as a person of color is valued. It is important to understand if journalist's perspectives as people of color are valued, since their experiences can offer unique insights about issues that primarily affect their specific communities. At the same time, however, it is important when valuing their EJOCs that news outlets do not tokenize¹⁴ their journalists. This is an issue that multiple journalists mention in regards to their specific perspective as a POC, and the frustrations they have around its effects. One EJOC mentions "When it comes to connecting or covering topics with subjects of color I am pushed to the forefront to be the representative," while another journalist describes tokenization as harmful because it "puts much pressure on the organization's token BIPOC." At the same time, another journalist mentions that "it seems [their] ideas or contributions [get] pushed to the wayside." As one Hispanic or Latino/a/e/x journalist summarizes, "As for whether my perspective as a person of color is valued, I would more likely say that it is seen as valuable. It is valuable that I speak Spanish and English, for example, but it is not something where I often see support." Value and support are distinctive and equally important, and as this journalist notes, are not always shown through concrete actions from news outlets.

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Even when newsrooms have internships, fellowships, or contract work for journalists of color, those journalists still often lack the security of a permanent, full-time job with benefits.

— EJOC identity as Asian

One action outlets can take to demonstrate value for their EJOC journalists is through increased compensation. Though EJOCs generally feel valued by their outlets, a little under half do not agree that they make a livable income in their current roles, and only slightly more agree. About half of EJOC respondents were employed full-time, while the other half were freelancers. One freelance journalist notes freelancing can provide a "healthier experience" relative to full-time work because editors "have a greater understanding of [their] skillset and experiences." However, another freelance journalist describes the disadvantage of freelancing, stating that "even when newsrooms have internships, fellowships, or contract work for journalists of color, those journalists still often lack the security of a permanent, full-time job with benefits." Regardless of employment type, paying EJOCs a livable wage is one of the first steps outlets can take to demonstrate they value EJOCs' contributions. By not doing so, outlets can contribute to EJOCs' feelings of burnout and decreased retention of EJOCs in the field.¹⁵

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The field of environmental journalism is led by White people who appear loathe [sic] to relinquish or share any real power or authority. This has a serious impact on my ability as an EJOC to succeed, thrive, and innovate coverage of environmental issues.

— EJOC identity as mixed race/ethnicity (American Indian, Alaska Native, Native American, or Indigenous, Hispanic or Latino/a/e/x, White)

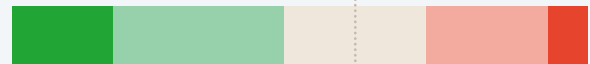
Do EJOCs Agree with the Following Statements Regarding Support?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree N/A

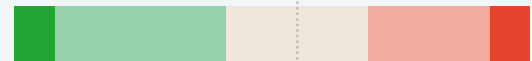
Q1: Editors and newsroom leaders make me feel comfortable with all intersections of my identity (race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, etc.)



Q2: I feel comfortable discussing issues and topics related to or about race/ethnicity with my colleagues/peers and newsroom.



Q3: I see leaders of color represented in my newsroom and organization.



Q1: 21.1% STRONGLY AGREE 35.1% AGREE 14.0% NEUTRAL 22.8% DISAGREE 7.0% STRONGLY DISAGREE 0% N/A

Q2: 17.5% STRONGLY AGREE 29.8% AGREE 24.6% NEUTRAL 21.1% DISAGREE 7.0% STRONGLY DISAGREE 0% N/A

Q3: 7.0% STRONGLY AGREE 15.8% AGREE 17.5% NEUTRAL 31.6% DISAGREE 28.1% STRONGLY DISAGREE 0% N/A

Other steps outlets can take to support their journalists are through diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice policies and efforts.¹⁶ However, the prevalence of such efforts vary depending on the newsroom. As one EJOC notes, “I believe there are more conversations and actions surrounding DEI happening in [the] workspace than I have seen before.” At the same time, however, one Indian journalist noticed, “In terms of environmental journalism, it seemed like I was 10 years ahead of most of my US peers in my understanding of how intersectional environmental and other social justice issues are.” A 30–39 year old journalist provides some nuance, explaining “I think there is a divide between my younger peers and newsroom leadership when it comes to attitudes and behavior regarding racial diversity in the environmental journalism field.”

Leadership has a disproportionate effect on what stories are told and the retention of journalists.¹⁷ Because of this, understanding how EJOCs feel supported (or not) by leadership can offer key insight. Almost two-thirds of EJOCs do not see leaders of color represented in their newsrooms. “Since joining my newsroom, I’ve navigated a majority White management and editors,” an EJOC explains. This EJOC’s experience is supported by data from this report’s Newsroom Demographics survey. This lack of representation in the field as a whole, and in leadership specifically, could contribute to EJOCs not feeling supported, as one EJOC explains they “often rely on other journalists of color rather than leadership for support.” One journalist expressed frustrations with a field in which they do not see their identities represented and notes “The field of environmental journalism is led by White people who appear loathe [sic] to relinquish or share any real power or authority. This has a serious impact on my ability as an EJOC to succeed, thrive, and innovate coverage of environmental issues.”

“

I have felt that certain issues or topics have been deemed “too political” such as reporting on the military industry and the climate crisis, or writing about why Palestine is a climate and environmental justice issue.

— EJOC identity as Middle Eastern

This lack of representation in leadership may also give context to other experiences EJOCs reported. For example, only half of EJOCs agree that their leadership makes them feel comfortable with all intersections of their identities, while just under a third do not. In addition, less than half feel comfortable discussing issues and topics related to or about ethnicity with their colleagues and newsrooms. In one example, this discomfort prevented a Middle Eastern journalist from reporting on environmental and climate issues: “I have felt that certain issues or topics have been deemed “too political” such as reporting on the military industry and the climate crisis, or writing about why Palestine is a climate and environmental justice issue.”

EJOCs generally feel that their outlets and leadership are interested in creating an environmental journalism sector representative of the population. However, many EJOCs highlight that these sentiments stop when accountability is required to implement the work needed to create more inclusive workplaces. EJOCs also express frustration in the lack of POC in leadership. All of these frustrations could help explain the sentiment shared by an EJOC, “Of the multiple outlets I’ve worked at now, [I’ve] only had a positive experience at the [ones] led by people of color.”

“

Understanding how racism is connected with environmental stories is crucial -- and may be missed without more journalists of color reporting on such topics.

— EJOC identity as mixed race/ethnicity
(Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino/a/e/x)

Do EJOCs Agree with the Following Statements Regarding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree N/A

Q1: A lack of diversity negatively impacts the coverage of environmental issues and stories.



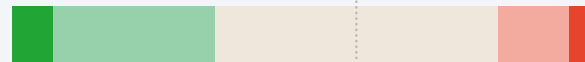
Q2: I incorporate my (cultural, racial, ethnic, etc) identity into my reporting.



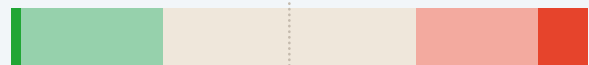
Q3: I have experienced bias or forms of racism in the field (e.g. microaggressions, discrimination, issues from outlets when trying to cover topics about my community, etc.)



Q4: My White counterparts believe diversity in the environmental journalism field is important.



Q5: I feel safe as a journalist of color.



Q1: 73.7% STRONGLY AGREE 21.1% AGREE 3.5% NEUTRAL 0% DISAGREE 1.8% STRONGLY DISAGREE 0% N/A
 Q2: 40.4% STRONGLY AGREE 38.6% AGREE 14% NEUTRAL 5.3% DISAGREE 1.8% STRONGLY DISAGREE 0% N/A
 Q3: 21.1% STRONGLY AGREE 38.6% AGREE 15.8% NEUTRAL 15.8% DISAGREE 8.8% STRONGLY DISAGREE 0% N/A
 Q4: 7% STRONGLY AGREE 28.1% AGREE 49.1% NEUTRAL 12.3% DISAGREE 3.5% STRONGLY DISAGREE 0% N/A
 Q5: 1.8% STRONGLY AGREE 24.6% AGREE 43.9% NEUTRAL 21.1% DISAGREE 8.8% STRONGLY DISAGREE 0% N/A

Over 95% of EJOCs agree that a lack of diversity negatively impacts the coverage of environmental issues and stories, the highest percent that agreed for any of the 16 statements. The majority of EJOCs (80%) also agree that they incorporate their cultural, racial, ethnic, etc. identity into their reporting. One journalist even points out that their identity as a POC “has contributed to [them] wanting to stay a reporter where [they] can do the most good.” This incorporation of specific perspectives is in part why diversity in newsrooms is so important.² As one EJOC explains, “Understanding how racism is connected with environmental stories is crucial -- and may be missed without more journalists of color reporting on such topics.”

Failing to include people from all communities in newsrooms can hurt not just external reporting, but internal news outlet culture.^{18, 19} Two-thirds of EJOCs report they have experienced bias or forms of racism in the field. For example, an Indian journalist shared how they faced both discrimination and racism: “Starting out editors were often not interested in looking at my work. One editor even told me that he thought that my English wasn’t going to be good or ‘American’ enough. No matter that I already had a Masters in English and had been working for four years at an English [news outlet] daily before I moved to the US.” The high percent of EJOCs who have experienced such treatment demonstrates that even though EJOCs report high diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice buy-in from leadership and peers, this interest does not always translate into practice. In fact, when asked specifically about their White counterparts, only one-third of EJOCs agree that their White counterparts think diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice is important in the field of environmental journalism. This is especially concerning given the context that leadership in the field is White dominated, and likely contributes to EJOCs experiencing bias and racism. A commitment to being allies and creating inclusive environments is needed from everyone, as an EJOC explains how it made all the difference in their career: “I do have one editor who is a White woman who is truly an ally and without her encouraging me I would’ve left journalism a long time ago.”

“

I am concerned about the ability of journalists of color to contribute to rural environment/climate stories when those spaces can sometimes be actually dangerous.

— EJOC identity as mixed race/ethnicity (Asian and White)

Finally, EJOCs are divided when asked if they felt safe as journalists of color. Half of EJOCs feel neutral, while nearly one-third do not, and 26% do. Safety can include a variety of factors, including ones internal to environmental journalism and ones external within the larger societal context. Internal feelings of safety can be affected by newsroom culture, outlets, leadership, peers, and coverage of traumatic topics,²⁰ while external feelings of safety can include systemic racism, housing access, job security, and more. All of these factors can contribute to EJOCs feeling unsafe because of physical violence, harassment, backlash from reporting on sensitive issues, and more. An EJOC’s feelings of safety can also be different depending on their specific location, as one journalist emphasizes “I am concerned about the ability of journalists of color to contribute to rural environment/climate stories when those spaces can sometimes be actually dangerous.”

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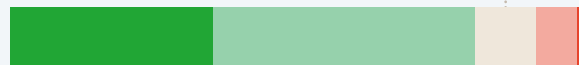
Because I didn't feel like my intersectional identities and lived experiences were valued, I left newsroom work.

— EJOC identity as Asian, nonbinary, with multiple sexual orientations, and having a disability.

Do EJOCs Agree with the Following Statements Regarding Entrance and Retention?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree N/A

Q1: I have experienced and/or currently experience burnout in my career.



Q2: As a journalist of color, I anticipate staying in the field for the next five years.



Q3: My experiences as a person of color have contributed to my decisions to leave other journalism roles.



Q4: The field of environmental journalism is accessible to new journalists of color entering the field.



Q1: 35.1% STRONGLY AGREE 45.6% AGREE 10.5% NEUTRAL 7% DISAGREE 1.8% STRONGLY DISAGREE 0% N/A

Q2: 24.6% STRONGLY AGREE 29.8% AGREE 29.8% NEUTRAL 10.5% DISAGREE 5.3% STRONGLY DISAGREE 0% N/A

Q3: 19.3% STRONGLY AGREE 19.3% AGREE 22.8% NEUTRAL 19.3% DISAGREE 10.5% STRONGLY DISAGREE 8.8% N/A

Q4: 0% STRONGLY AGREE 17.5% AGREE 24.6% NEUTRAL 38.6% DISAGREE 19.3% STRONGLY DISAGREE 0% N/A

Understanding retention of EJOCs and accessibility of the field to new EJOCs can offer important insight into how the environmental journalism field can adapt and better support all journalists. Eighty percent of EJOCs report currently or historically experiencing burnout in their career, ranking this statement as the second highest one that EJOCs agreed with. Burnout can be caused by a variety of factors discussed previously in this report, such as low pay and a lack of support from leadership.¹⁵ In addition, burnout can be especially hard on POC in White-dominated spaces due to feelings of isolation and invalidation.²¹ Such feelings could be caused by many of the things discussed previously, like low pay, experiences of racism and discrimination, and/or not feeling safe or empowered to discuss topics related to EJOCs' identities. In fact, one nonbinary EJOC who identified with multiple sexual orientations and as having a disability specifically said "Because I didn't feel like my intersectional identities and lived experiences were valued, I left newsroom work."

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Conclusion

Newsroom Demographics: Environmental Journalism Survey

Results from this report's first survey point to substantial room for growth in news outlets' demographic data collection practices. Of the outlets that collect demographic data, they reported "Do not have data" for between 65–90% of their environmental journalists in three of the four demographic categories: gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status. Race and ethnicity data was more complete, but 30% of the data was still missing. Of the existing data, the majority of environmental journalists at outlets are White, straight, cis women who do not identify as having a disability, suggesting environmental journalists are not representative of the people who live in our nation. In order to generate a more accurate picture of demographics in the sector, news outlets should collect demographic data at the intersection of identities like gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability status.

Experiences of Journalists of Color Survey

The majority of EJOC respondents had 1–10 years of experience in the field and were 18–39 years old. There was also significantly more representation amongst EJOCs in all demographic categories compared to the first survey. The percentages of EJOCs who identified as transgender, with gender expansive identities, as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, and as having a disability were all significantly higher amongst EJOCs. The most substantial difference occurred in the sexual orientation data, in which 35% of EJOCs identified as belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community relative to the 2.5% of environmental journalists in the first survey.

Over 95% of EJOCs agree that a lack of diversity negatively impacts the coverage of environmental issues and stories, the highest percent that agreed for any of the statements. Half of EJOCs also feel their peers and newsroom leadership are interested in improving diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice within environmental journalism. Despite this, two-thirds of EJOCs do not see people of color represented in newsroom leadership and do not feel outlets and leadership make them feel comfortable with all aspects of their identities. This points to a substantial gap in the field, in which there seems to be a buy-in to the ideology and benefits to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice work without tangible efforts to implement those practices.

This gap is especially concerning because 80% of EJOCs report currently or historically experiencing burnout in their career, ranking this statement as the second highest one that EJOCs agreed with. Forty percent of EJOCs agree their experience as a person of color has contributed to them leaving previous roles. This burnout and exit from roles could be caused by a variety of factors, like EJOCs feeling they don't make a livable income (~2/3 EJOCs), don't feel safe as a journalist of color (30% EJOCs), and have experienced racism in the field (~2/3 EJOCs).

Moving Forward

Environmental journalism is taking the first steps towards becoming an effective sector, but is struggling to move forward. The majority of outlets, leadership, and EJOCs collectively express interest in building a sector more representative of our country. They recognize that such practices can improve internal newsroom efficacy and staff retention. They also understand that including environmental journalists from multiple perspectives can benefit their reporting work and the field in general by including different perspectives and by building trust with their readers. However, this interest is not translating into action, as evidenced by EJOCs reporting feelings of unsafety and burnout, and the failure of leadership to make them feel comfortable with all intersections of their identities. Implementing concrete changes are essential to create a field where not just EJOCs, but all journalists, can thrive. Such changes can include implementing any number of effective workplace practices, like ensuring all staff are fairly compensated and implementing processes to address any forms of discrimination.

It is important to note these surveys occurred in 2024, so outlets' interest in improving diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice efforts may be different even as this report is released relative to when surveys were distributed. With the ever-evolving political climate, it's possible the sector will shift in values and priorities. This report offers an important beginning to understanding the sector, and points to areas for growth in surveying additional outlets and conducting more in-depth and extensive interviews with environmental journalists.

The plethora of research that demonstrates environmental and climate issues negatively affect certain communities differently means taking an intersectional approach when deciding how to move forward as a sector is essential.⁶⁻⁹ Without including the perspective of those who are especially vulnerable, important and unique perspectives will be left out, and the environmental journalism field as a whole will fail to progress to its full potential. If environmental journalism is to continue to evolve, journalists and outlets must create a field that journalists can thrive in.

Methodology

This Behind the Byline: Voices From Environmental Journalism Report was analyzed by Michelle Gin, Green 2.0's Program Manager. Michelle analyzed the data submitted by 22 outlets and 57 journalists of color using Google Sheets.

Data for the report was collected through two different surveys. The first, the Newsroom Demographics: Environmental Journalism Survey, was for outlets and collected the demographic data of outlets' environmental journalism staff. The second, the Experiences of Environmental Journalists of Color Survey, was for individual journalists of color. The second survey collected demographic information of EJOCs and asked them sliding scale questions. Data was voluntarily submitted and self-reported by individual outlets and journalists. After submitting their data, outlets and journalists were provided the opportunity to update or correct it as relevant. All relevant outlets and journalists responded to these inquiries, so all completed submissions were included in the report analysis.

Newsroom Demographics: Environmental Journalism Survey

Green 2.0 and SEJ reached out to 133 outlets over the course of one and a half months, but only 22 responded. Fifty percent of these outlets that participated were hybrid outlets, meaning a combination of print, magazine, radio/podcasting, etc. Of the remaining outlets, 36.4% were online media outlets, 9.1% were digital media outlets, and 4.5% were television outlets exclusively. Outlets ranged in size from 0–390 full-time journalists, with an average size of 33 full-time journalists. On average, they also employed one journalist on contract and 15 freelance journalists, with ranges of 0–8 journalists on contract and 0–71 freelance journalists. Of all the outlets, 45.5% were “small” outlets that employed <20 journalists, 31.8% were “mid-sized” outlets that employed 21–49 journalists, and 22.7% were “large” outlets that employed 50+. Of these journalists, 1–106 covered environmental topics at least 10% of the time. On average, outlets employed 20 environmental journalists.

For outlets in this section of this report, all demographic data was aggregated into one analysis so specific demographic information is not attributed to any specific outlet. Though direct quotes from outlets were used in this report, no identifying information specific to one was shared to maintain anonymity.

Experiences of Journalists of Color Survey

Over the same time period, Green 2.0 and SEJ conducted outreach to environmental journalists and received 61 responses, but only 57 of these contained relevant data. This report defines “journalist of color” as any participant that self-identified as a racial/ethnic category other than White. Environmental journalists could be US-based in addition to doing some work internationally.

Of the 57 EJOCs, two-thirds held the title “reporter” exclusively, while 22.8% were reporters in addition to holding other titles like editor, photographer, producer, and/or researcher. Of the remaining journalists of color, 3.5% were producers, 3.5% were editors, 1.8% were photographers, and 1.8% were weather anchors. About half of the journalists were freelance journalists (47.4%), while 45.6% were employed full-time in association with specific outlets. The remaining 7% of journalists fell into other employment situations including job hunting or being grant funded, a fellow, or part-time.

All EJOCs covered environmental or climate related topics at least 10% of the time, but their focuses differed. Over half of the journalists (54.4%) had climate or environmental desks/beats, while 24.6% had partial environmental/climate coverage focus. About 17.5% of journalists covered topics in addition to climate/environmental ones, which included topics ranging from other general assignments to crime. Of the journalists that had multiple topic focuses, 5.3% covered weather/meteorology, while 5.3% covered equity, justice, indigenous affairs, and/or human rights. Finally, 1.8% of journalists covered weather/meteorology topics exclusively, while another 1.8% spent the majority of their time on general assignments.

For this second section, EJOCs were told on surveys their identities would be kept anonymous, but some identity information would be shared to contextualize quotes. Thus, throughout the report, direct quotes from EJOCs include some, but not all, demographic information as it relates to the journalist and specific quote. Green 2.0 and SEJ made sure not to include identifiable demographic information after quotes to maintain anonymity.

The views and opinions expressed in the survey responses referenced and/or quoted in this report are those of the respondents and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Green 2.0.

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