Why do editors leave Wikipedia?

A study of casual editors of the English Wikipedia

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The following information was presented at Wikimania 2010. Some of the content has been modified for publication on the web.

Why do editors leave Wikipedia?

- Why I’m interested in this topic
- Survey Results
- Q&A

Active Contributors: ~40K/month

New Wikipedians: ~8-9K/month

The following is not a study of whether Wikipedia is in decline. . .

. . .but keeping valuable contributors from leaving is generally a good thing

A Qualitative Survey
Strategy Project – WMF/Community

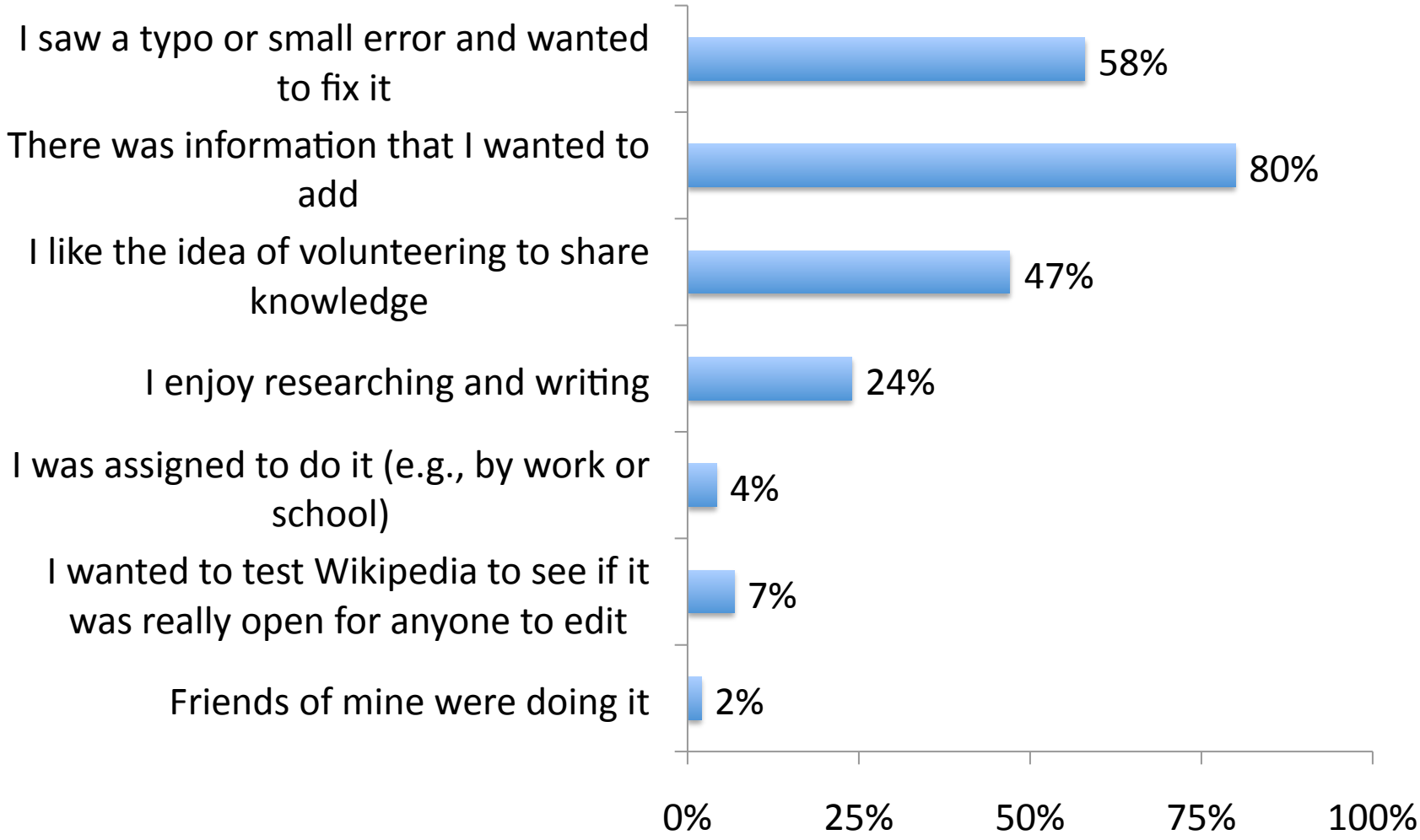
- **Objective:** to better understand why casual contributors are leaving Wikipedia
- **How:** Sent online survey (via email in Jan 2010) out to 10,000 "casual contributors" defined as users who have:
  - 20-99 lifetime edits
  - Have "left" (no edits within last 3 months)
  - Last edit was in 2009
- **Response rate:**
  - **12% (1238) completed survey**
  - 80% (989) of respondents provided at least one comment; 2,461 total comments
  - 36% (451) are open to a follow-up call
  - ~15 follow-up interviews conducted

"I appreciate the fact that you noticed that I haven't contributed lately."

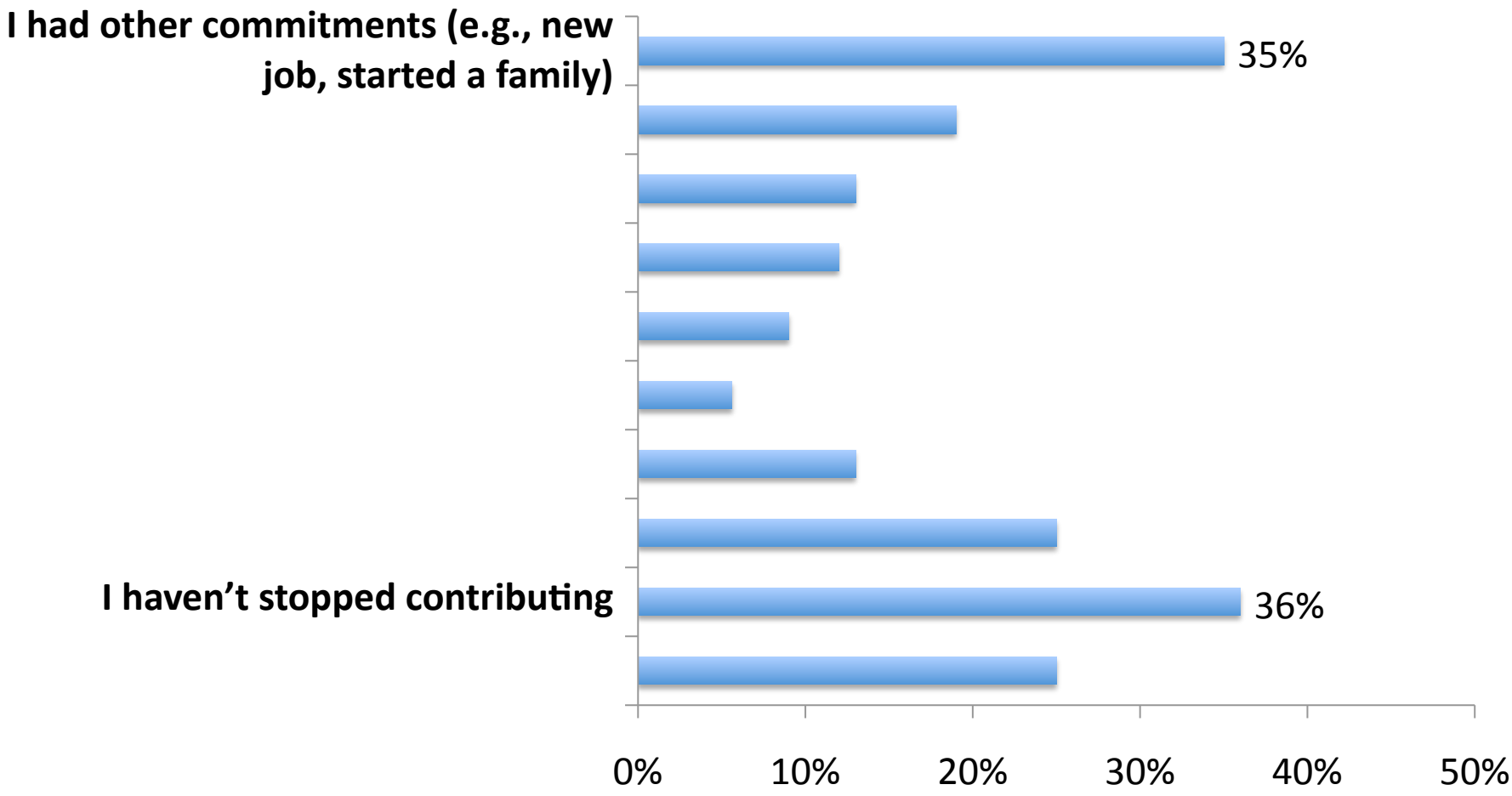
Survey Questions

- When did you start editing?
- When did you make your last edit?
- During your time as an active editor, roughly how many edits did you make in a typical month?
- **Why did you start contributing to Wikipedia?**
- **Why did you stop contributing to Wikipedia?**
- **At the time of your last edit, did you personally feel like you still had a lot to add to Wikipedia? (1-5)**
- **What was your most rewarding experience with Wikipedia? Why? (open)**
- **What was your worst experience with Wikipedia? Why? (open)**
- Did the difficulty of the work have an impact on your decision to stop contributing?
- Did the community have an impact on your decision to stop contributing?
- How likely are you to start contributing again? (1-5)
- Please read the following statements and select all that you believe are true.
- Is there anything else you would like us to know? (open)
- 14-16. Availability for follow-up

Why did you start contributing to Wikipedia?



Why did you stop contributing to Wikipedia?



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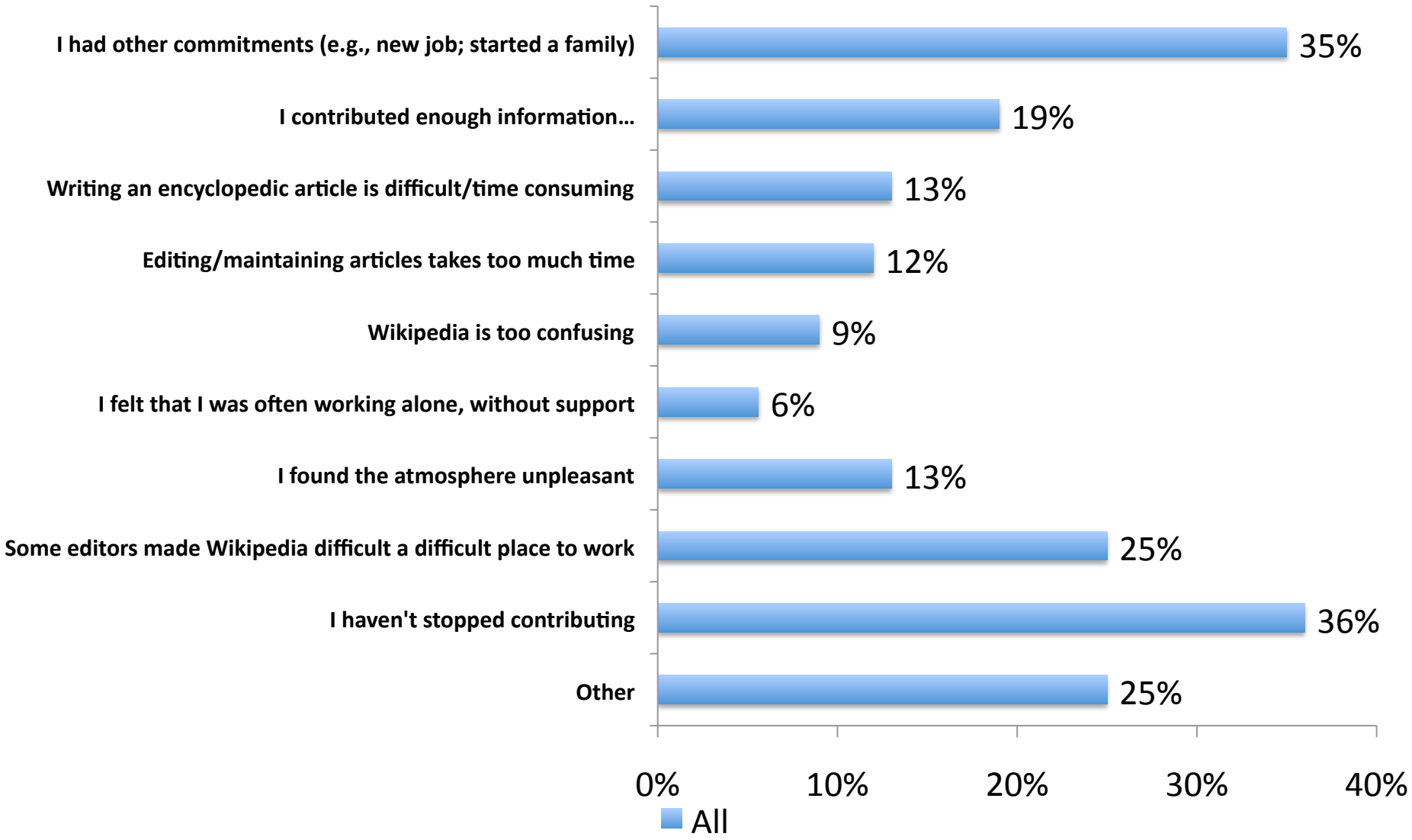

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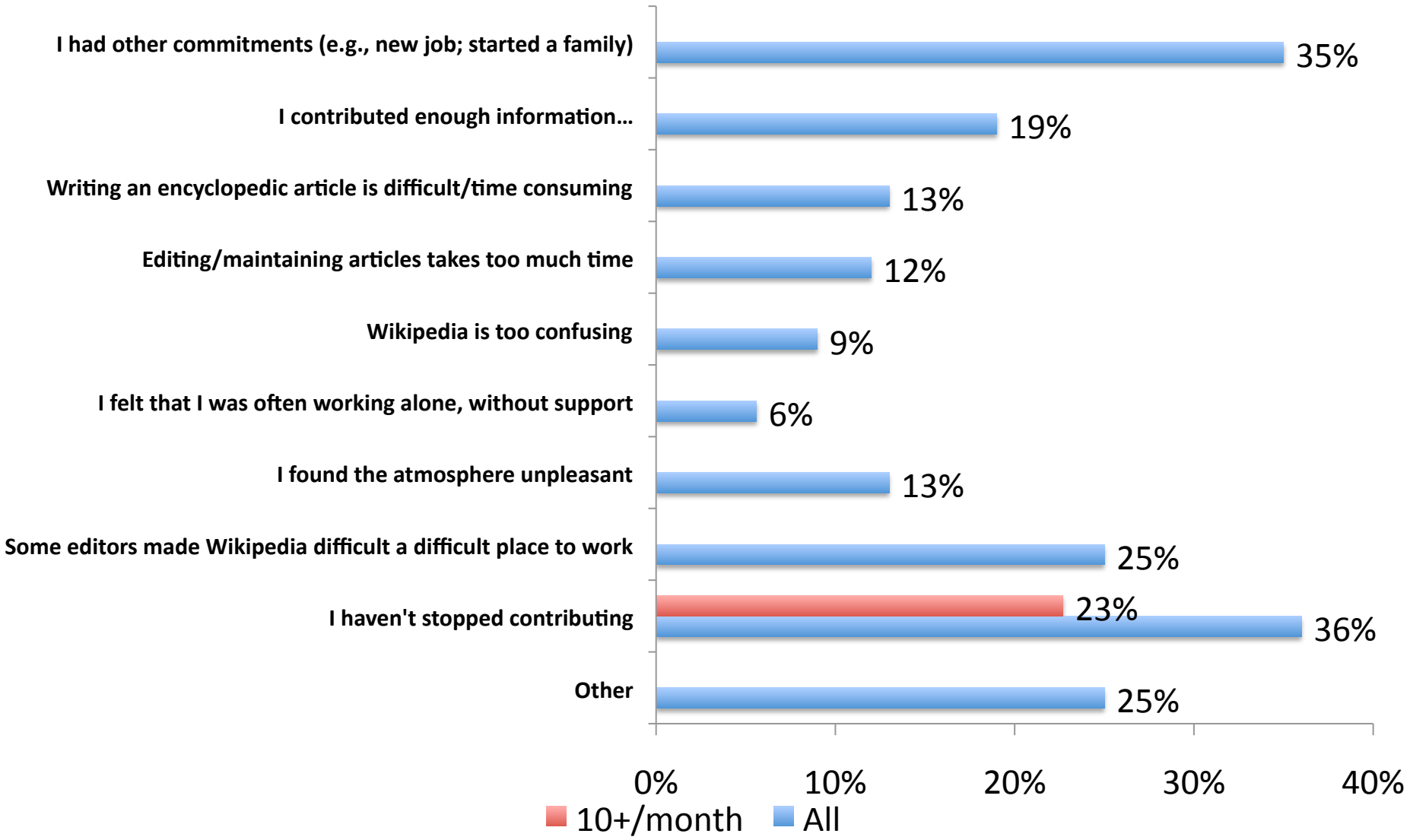

10+/month = Users who self-reported having contributed over 10 edits/month as of their last edit

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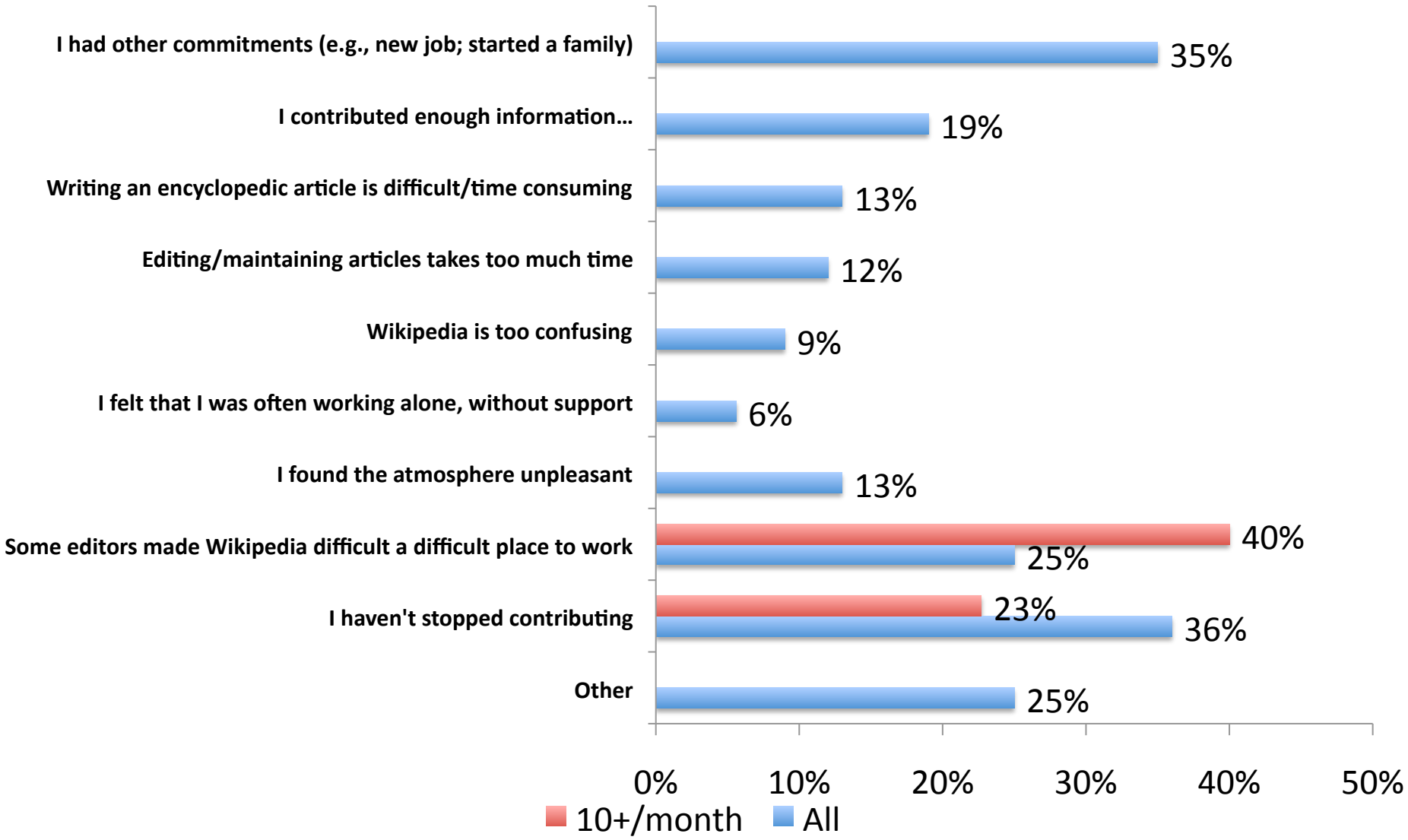

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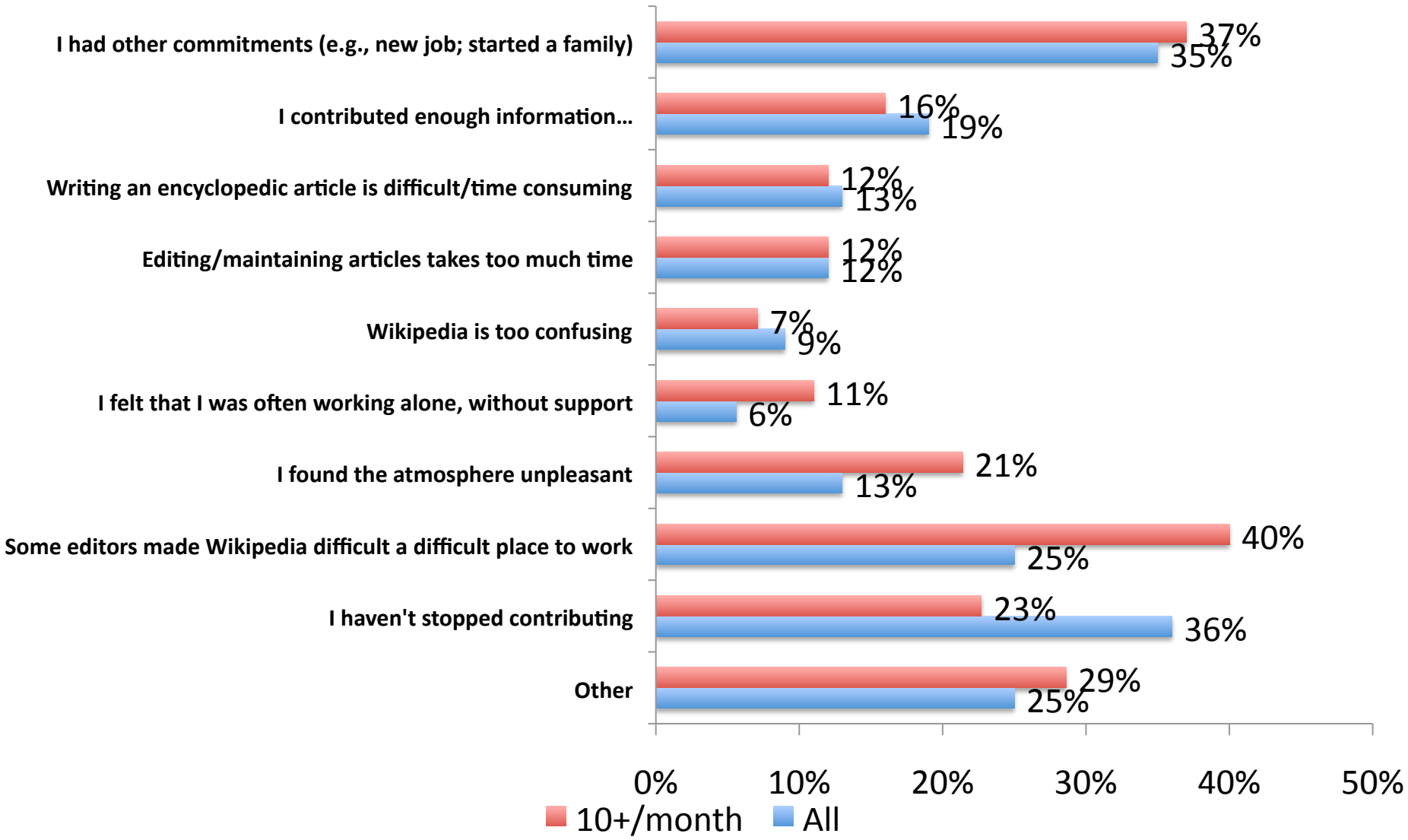
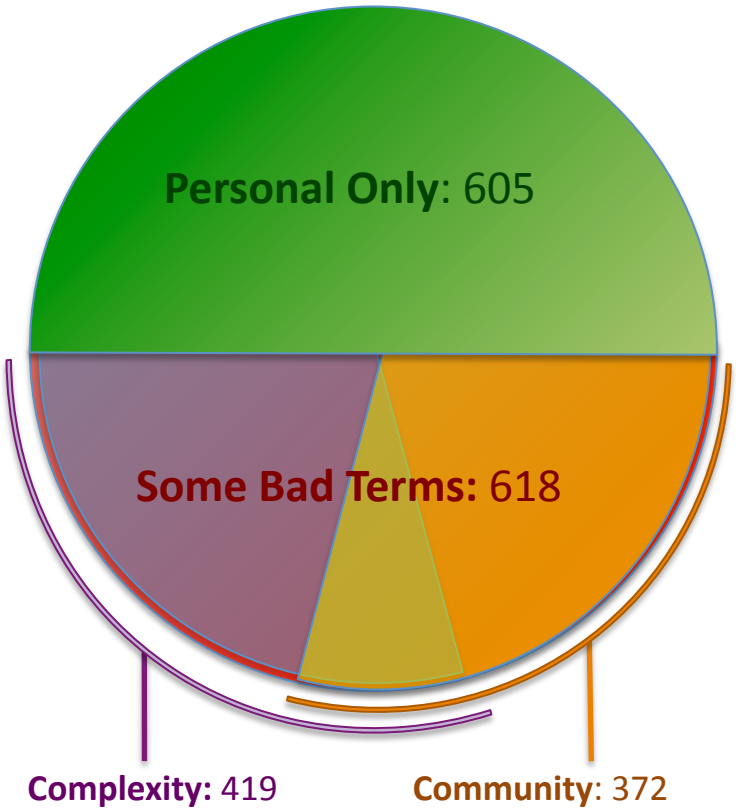
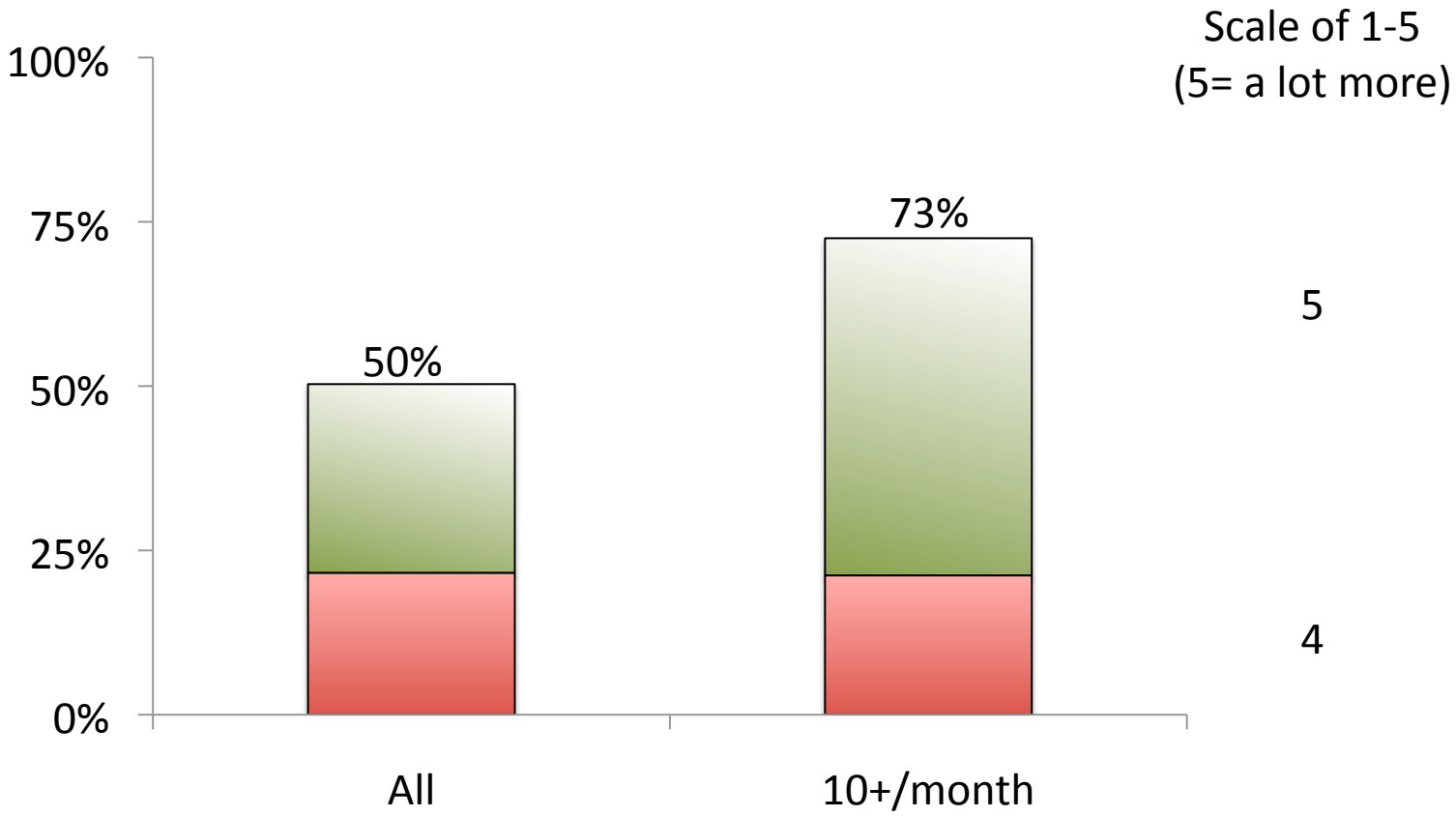


Why They Leave: Breakdown



At the time of your last edit, did you personally feel like you still had a lot to add to the Wikipedia?



Why?

Most Rewarding Experience

- By recently helping me better understand my husband's <medical condition>. The collection of knowledge and resources Wikipedia makes available literally **gave us more confidence and control over our lives**.
- Working on the **article about my <family member>** . . . (neither of which I started, but they were stubs when I arrived). Self-explanatory.

Most Rewarding Experience

- **Having a pro help** placing the photo and info in the right place.
- I got a barnstar because **someone noticed** that I had done some re-arranging and rephrasing in an article.
- Realizing my edits **had not been erased**, but instead somebody worked on them and improved them.
- Seeing an article that I had considerably expanded get Good Article **status**.

Worst Experience

- Having my edits reversed - also, nothing about this was explained in a fashion that was easily understood. The people **"overseeing"** the edits appeared to be **too power-hungry** in their roles.
- One or Two Editors that **think they are God** and make life uneasy even though I follow the rules of Wikipedia.
- Having edits reversed, or eliminated because other people feel **territorial** about certain topics, and **refuse to accept the input** from other people.
- Editors **pushing their POV** whilst claiming they are without bias...
- There was no one horrible experience. I just found it unpleasant over time... it seemed like there were an **awful lot of bullies**.

Worst Experience

- Other contributors reversing whole paragraphs that I spent a long time on to write carefully.
- Having **no response to my work**. My goal is to foster collaboration - to act as a catalyst for realizing a higher level of knowledge. When a start even a stub and nothing happens, I can't help but feel that knowledge doesn't matter.
- **They** always delete my edits

- Other notable mentions:
  - Vandalism
  - Treatment of individuals with academic credentials
  - Errors

Respondents' Perceptions of Editors Fall in a Few Main Categories

- POV-pushing
- Power complex
- Rigid
- Impolite

Activities that give rise to these perceptions

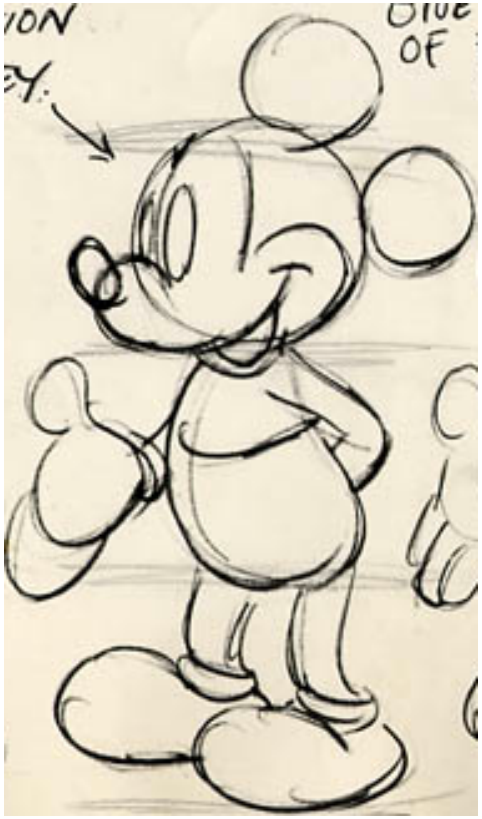
- Reversions
- Article deletions

Summary

- Concept of “leaving” is nuanced and needs further exploration
- New/casual editors notice when we notice:
  - Recognition
  - Help
- Reasons for leaving:

All	Heavier Contributors
#1: Other commitments #2: Difficult Editors #3: Contributed Enough	#1: Difficult editors #2: Other commitments #3: Unpleasant Atmosphere

An appeal to Be Bold and act on this information



Source: http://bigtoon.deviantart.com/art/how-to-draw-Mickey-mouse-114276240, License: CC-by

Let's continue the discussion. . .

More detailed results from the survey may be found here:
http://strategy.wikimedia.org/wiki/Former_Contributors_Survey_Results

There is a survey targeted towards administrators in the works:
http://strategy.wikimedia.org/wiki/Task_force/Community_Health/Former_administrators_survey

Please feel free to contact me if you would like to be involved in the effort the effort to better understand our users' lifecycles and how we may improve Community Health: hfung at wikimedia dot org

A special thanks to User:RandomRan for his help in developing the survey and analyzing the results