

## “MY” MEDIA VERSUS “THE” MEDIA: TRUST IN NEWS DEPENDS ON WHICH NEWS MEDIA YOU MEAN

For years, studies have shown Americans’ trust in the news media is steadily declining. In recent months, the rise of so-called fake news and the rhetoric of President Donald Trump about journalists being “the enemy of the people”<sup>1</sup> have made the question of trust in a free press an even more prominent issue facing the country.

At the same time, data show that over the past decade, people have been consuming more news than ever.<sup>2</sup> How are we to explain the apparent paradox?

New research released today by the Media Insight Project, a collaboration of the American Press Institute and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, suggests public attitudes about the news media are more complex and nuanced than many traditional studies indicate, with attitudes varying markedly depending on what media people are asked about.

The findings show that on many fronts, Americans are skeptical of “the news media” in the abstract, but generally trust the news they themselves rely on. And most people mention traditional or mainstream news sources as the ones they turn to.

As an example, only 24 percent of Americans say they believe the news media in general are “moral.” But that number more than doubles, to a majority of 53 percent, when people are asked about the news media they use most often.

Just 17 percent of Americans give the news media high marks for being “very accurate.” But twice as many (34 percent) say that about the news media they use.



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### How people view the news media in general versus the media they use most

	“The news media”	“The news media you use most often”
Very accurate	17	34
Moral	24	53
Willing to admit their mistakes	27	47
Protect democracy	34	48
Care about people they report on	22	41

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/business/trump-calls-the-news-media-the-enemy-of-the-people.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/business/trump-calls-the-news-media-the-enemy-of-the-people.html?_r=0)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.people-press.org/2010/09/12/americans-spending-more-time-following-the-news/>

Only 22 percent believe the news media in general “care about the people they report on,” while more people (36 percent) say they do not (about four in ten say neither option reflects their view). But the reverse is true if people are asked about the news media they turn to. Nearly twice as many people believe the news media they rely on care about people than doubt it (41 percent vs. 24 percent).

The country is evenly divided over whether the press on balance “protects” or “hurts” democracy. In all, 34 percent say it protects while 30 percent say it hurts. But that division disappears when people are asked about the news media they use. More than twice as many (48 percent) believe the press outlets they use protect democracy than say they hurt it (20 percent).

While Republicans and, to a lesser extent, independents trust the news media less than Democrats do, many of those divisions also shrink, and in some cases go away, when people are asked about the news media they rely on most.

For example, only 8 percent of Republicans but 31 percent of Democrats describe the news media as “very accurate.” But that number jumps to 40 percent for Republicans when they think of the news media they use most, a number similar to what is seen among Democrats.

The change is not simply because Republicans and Democrats are turning now largely to partisan or ideological news sources, though there is some of that. There are partisan divisions in what people consume. When asked in an open-ended question to name the news sources they use most often, Republicans are more likely to cite cable news as a favorite source (52 percent) than are Democrats or independents (both at 37 percent). Republicans are also more than twice as likely to cite Fox News as a favorite source (40 percent) than CNN (18 percent); Democrats are more likely to cite CNN (30 percent) and far less likely to cite Fox (7 percent).

But traditional broadcast television—both national and local—is the second-most commonly cited news source, regardless of party identification. And people across the political spectrum are equally likely to say local news sources (newspaper, radio, and television) are among those they rely on.

To be sure, this report does not imply that the issue of media trust and reliability is a myth or somehow magically disappears depending on the media consumers are thinking about.

But the findings suggest the issue is more complicated than some may think. Americans appear to consider “the news media” a general category that includes both good and bad actors, and their confidence in the media in general is shrinking. But most Americans are able to find at least one outlet they have confidence in across a number of metrics asked about in the study. And the idea of Americans retreating from news entirely out of lack of trust—or heading for purely ideological corners—oversimplifies what is occurring.

Even at a time of growing distrust in the media generally, people can find news sources they think are accurate, fair, moral, transparent about mistakes, and trustworthy. And these sources are not purely political. In cable news viewership, there is more party overlap among viewers than people might imagine. And about 35 percent of Americans across the political spectrum cite broadcast television news—local and national—as a source they use often.

The new research does reveal stark partisan divisions in public attitudes about the press, much as other research has. But these partisan divisions, too, depend on whether people are asked about the media in general or the media they personally use.

There is another noteworthy element in the data, however. There are significant generational differences in the levels of trust in media. Americans under age 40, regardless of ideology, trust the news media far less than their elders do.

And while these differences become smaller when adults under age 40 are asked about the sources they rely on, they do not entirely disappear.

## PREVIOUS CONCEPTIONS OF TRUST IN MEDIA

Researchers have found trust in media declining for several years now, though they don't all agree on when the trend started.

The Gallup research organization, which has been asking about media trust in general since 1972, found it hit a high-water mark in 1976, three years after the Watergate scandal. That year, 72 percent of Americans said they had "a great deal" or "a fair amount" of "trust in the mass media." With the advent of cable news and the rise of talk radio in the 1980s, that number began to fall to the low and mid 50s by the 1990s, and remained there for roughly a decade. It has fallen slowly but fairly consistently since the early 2000s, dropping below 50 percent in 2007. In September 2016, it hit a new low of 32 percent; among Republicans, it was just 14 percent.<sup>3</sup>

In the mid-1980s, when the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press was still the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press, it began asking about media trust using several metrics. Over the decades, its findings have been similar to Gallup's. For instance, the percentage of Americans who think news organizations "deal fairly with all sides" when "dealing with political and social issues" dropped from 34 percent in 1988 to 19 percent in 2013. The percentage who think "news organizations get the facts straight" fell from 55 percent in 1985 to 26 percent in 2013.<sup>4</sup> In February 2016, only 18 percent of Americans had "a lot of trust" in the information they got from national news organizations and 22 percent had "a lot" of trust in the information they got from local news groups.<sup>5</sup>

But the news media have fragmented, evolved, and been disrupted over those years. News has been put in people's pockets on their phones and has been atomized into a story at a time in social media rather than under the aegis of a news brand like it would be if received through a newspaper or television broadcast. And with those changes, news consumption appears by many measures to have grown.<sup>6</sup>

## "THE" MEDIA IN GENERAL VS. "MY" MEDIA

To dig deeper, the Media Insight Project adopted many of the traditional questions developed by Gallup and Pew but varied them in one important way—we asked one group about "the news media" in general while asking another group about "the news media you use most often."

Overall, people consume a lot of news. Fully 79 percent of those surveyed say they get news at least once a day, and 58 percent say they get it several times a day.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/195542/americans-trust-mass-media-sinks-new-low.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.people-press.org/2013/08/08/amid-criticism-support-for-medias-watchdog-role-stands-out/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/trust-and-accuracy/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.people-press.org/2010/09/12/americans-spending-more-time-following-the-news/>

Americans' ideas of what the news media are looks similar to what they identify as the news media they use most often, though with some key differences. And notably, people mention a lot of different types of outlets when asked about the news media in general, suggesting that it is a catch-all category. People most often cite cable news (48 percent), broadcast TV (37 percent), local TV, radio, or newspapers (18 percent), and national newspapers (16 percent) when asked what they consider "the news media." Cable news (41 percent), broadcast TV (28 percent), and local news (22 percent) were the most frequently cited when people were asked about the "news media you use most often," with national newspapers trailing behind news sites or the internet generally (12 percent vs. 16 percent).

We see interesting changes among both Democrats and Republicans when we ask people what they consider to be the news media versus the media they use. For example, 47 percent of Democrats consider cable news "the news media," but just 37 percent say the same when asked about the news media they use most often. But, about half of Republicans think of cable both as the media in general and the media they use often. On the other hand, 41 percent of Republicans consider broadcast TV the news media in general, while just 23 percent think of it when asked about news media they use often. And, while just 5 percent of Republicans consider news websites like Politico, Breitbart and other outlets on the internet "the news media," 16 percent say those sources are the media they use most often. These examples show how each party can have a conception of "the news media" separate from the news media they use.

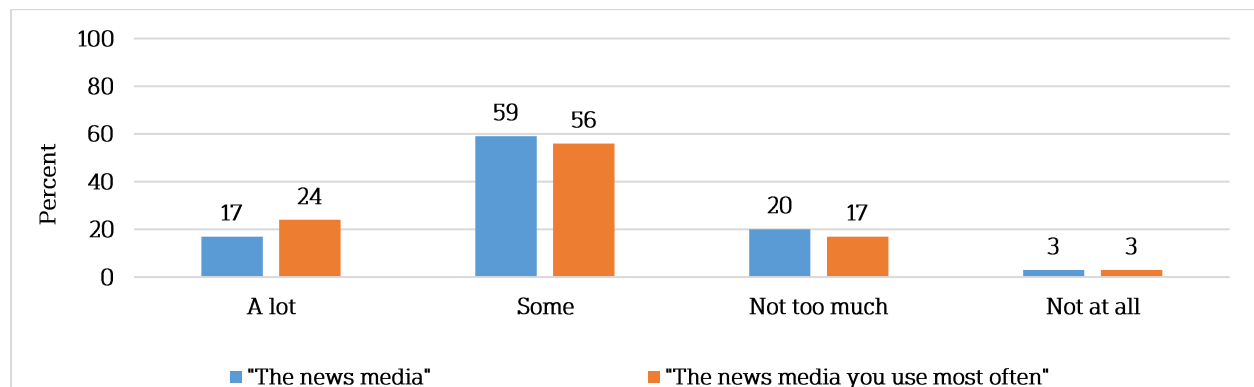
As a general indicator of trust, we adapted a question used by Pew:

"How much, if at all, do you trust the information you get?"

And we asked one group about the "the news media" and the other about "the news media you use most often." This yielded some differences.

For instance, just 17 percent of Americans say that "thinking of the news media" generally, they have "a lot" of trust in the information they get. That number jumps to 24 percent when people are asked about the news media they use most often, a number similar to what Pew found a year earlier with local news.<sup>7</sup>

**People are more likely to say they trust the news media they use most compared to the news media generally.**



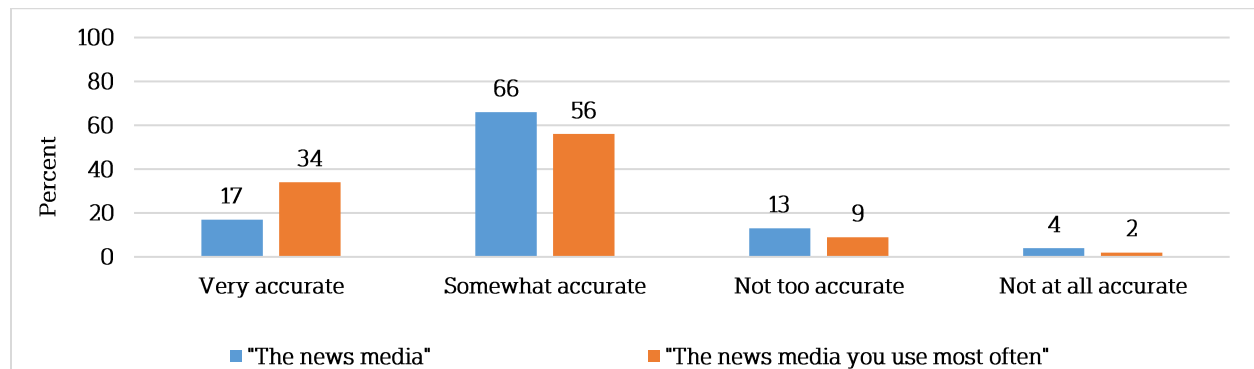
Question: Thinking of [the news media/the news media you use most often] how much, if at all, do you trust the information you get?

<sup>7</sup> [http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2016/07/08140127/PJ\\_2016.07.07\\_Modern-News-Consumer\\_TOPLINE.pdf](http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2016/07/08140127/PJ_2016.07.07_Modern-News-Consumer_TOPLINE.pdf)

But the differences in how people viewed the news media became more pronounced when we dug deeper into the other questions.

How accurate do people think the news media are? People are twice as inclined to say the media they use most often are "very accurate" than they are to say that about the media in general. More than a third of people consider the news media they use most often to be very accurate (34 percent) compared to fewer than 2 in 10 (17 percent) who say the same about the news media generally. And people are significantly less likely to say the media they use most are not too accurate or not accurate at all (10 percent vs. 17 percent for the news media generally).

**Americans are more likely to say the news media they use most are very accurate than they are to say the same about the news media generally.**

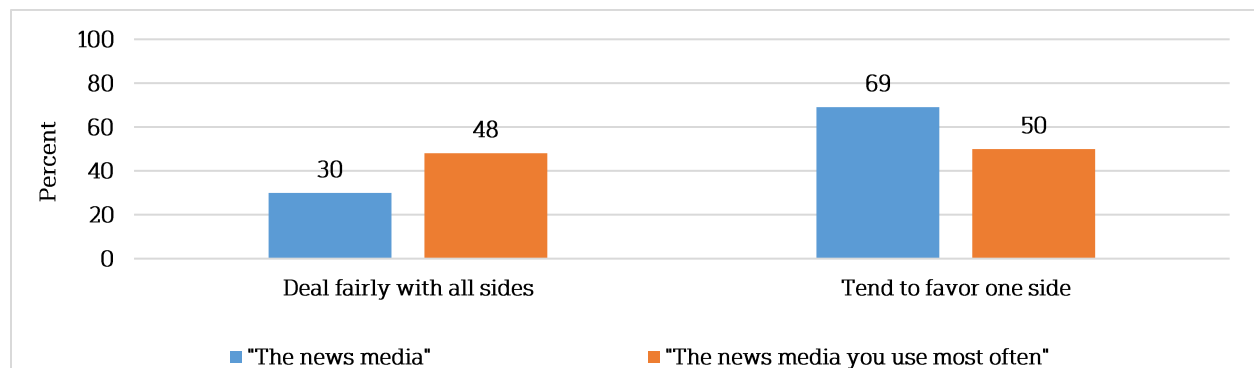


Question: Would you say the news from [the news media/the news media you use most often] is...?

People also are more likely to think the media they use most often deal fairly with all sides compared to the news media in general. Fully 48 percent of Americans feel that way about the media they use most often, while half say they tend to favor one side.

That even split is no vote of confidence for the media's fairness, but it is a much better picture than people have of the media in general. When thinking about media generally, just 30 percent say the media deal fairly with all sides, while more than double that—69 percent—say the media generally tend to favor one side.

**More than two-thirds say the news media tend to favor one side, though fewer say the same about the media they use most often.**

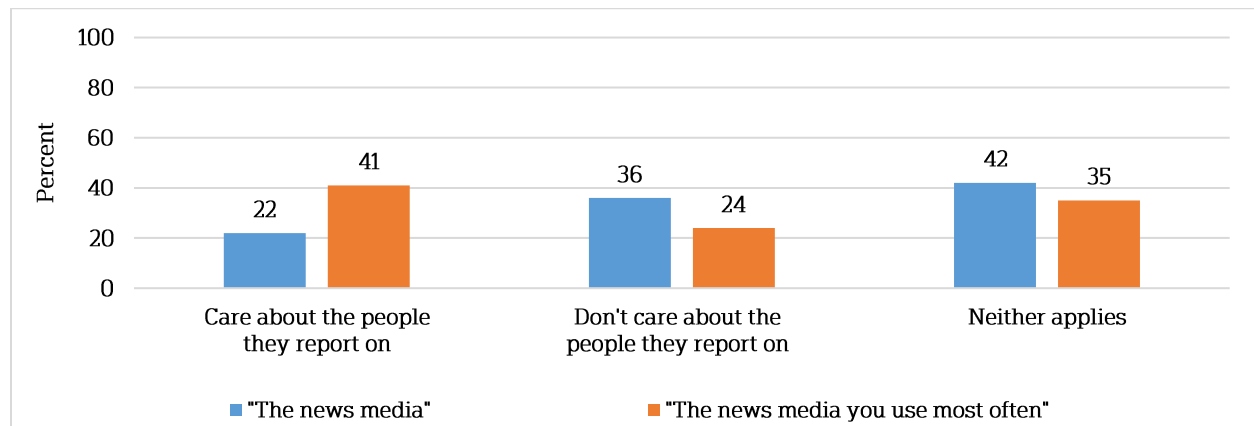


Question: In presenting the news dealing with political and social issues, do you think that [the news media/the news media you use most often] deal fairly with all sides, or do they tend to favor one side?

When asked how the media keep people informed about the most important stories of the day, the percentage who feel "very well informed" jumps to 33 percent from 24 percent when people are thinking about the media they rely on instead of the media in general.

Do the news media care about the people they report on? The answer changes dramatically if people are thinking about the news media in general or the news media they rely on most. Just 22 percent of people say they believe the news media generally care about the people they report on. But the number who say the media care nearly doubles to 41 percent for the media they used most often (and the number who think the media do not care drops 12 percentage points).

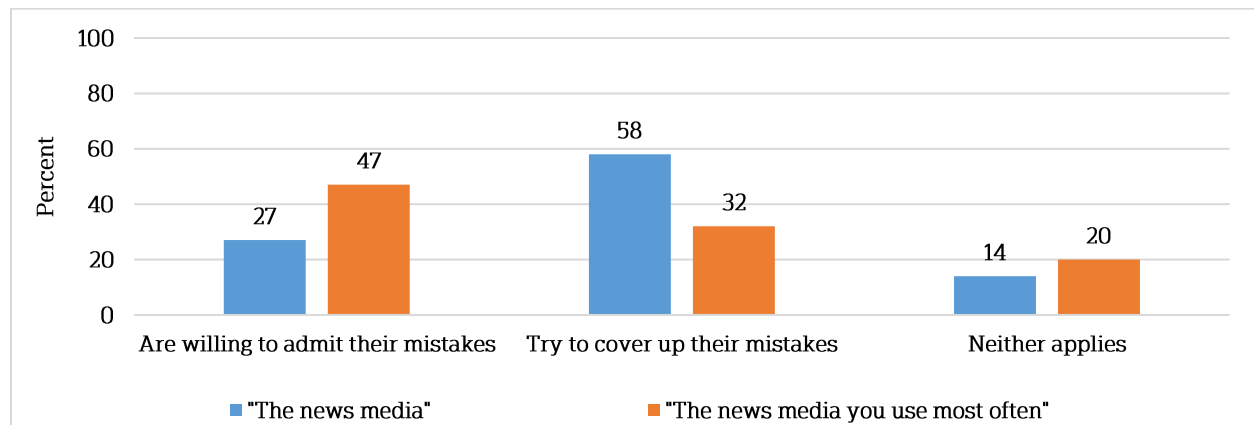
**People are twice as likely to say the news media they use most care about people as they are to say it about the news media generally.**



Question: Here are some pairs of opposite phrases. Which phrase do you feel better describes [the news media/the news media you use most often]? Would you say [the news media/the news media you use most often]...

Are the media willing to admit their mistakes? Only 27 percent think the media in general do, while the majority (58 percent) think the media try to cover up their mistakes. When asked about the media they use most often, however, 47 percent think the media usually admit their mistakes, and fewer (32 percent) think they try to hide them.

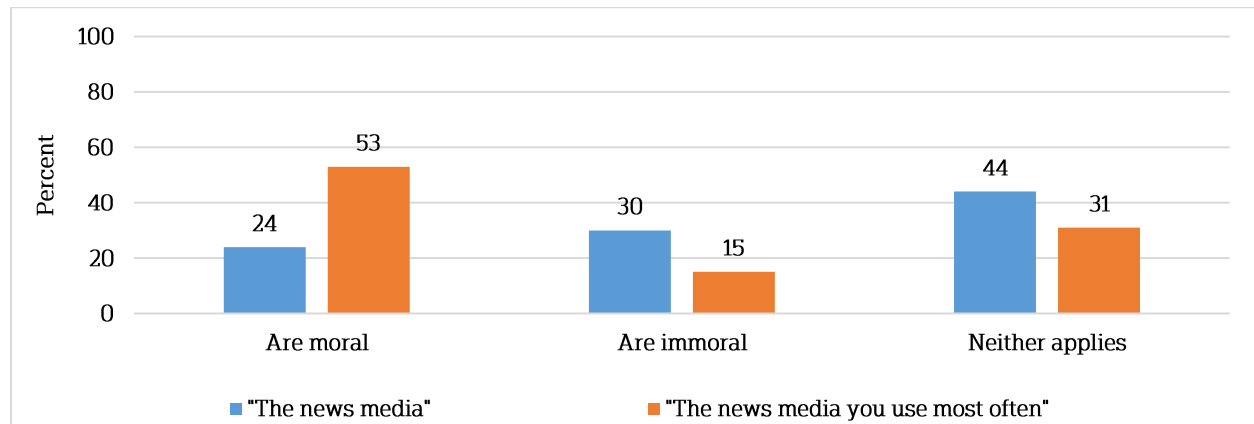
**Do the media cover up mistakes? Most think the media in general do, but not the media they use.**



Question: Here are some pairs of opposite phrases. Which phrase do you feel better describes [the news media/the news media you use most often]? Would you say [the news media/the news media you use most often]...

Do people think the media are moral? Just 24 percent think the media in general are moral. But 53 percent think the media they use most often are.

**People are nearly twice as likely to think the media they use are moral than they are to think it about media in general.**



Question: Here are some pairs of opposite phrases. Which phrase do you feel better describes [the news media/the news media you use most often]? Would you say [the news media/the news media you use most often]...

What about the impact of the media on democracy overall? Does the press protect democracy or hurt it? When asking about the media in general, people are split—34 percent say the media tend to help democracy, while 30 percent say they hurt it.

But when people think about the news media they use most often, 48 percent think the press helps democracy while far fewer, 20 percent, say it hurts.

## SUPPORT FOR THE WATCHDOG

One area where public confidence in the media has not eroded over the years is the watchdog role of the press. The Pew Research Center, for several years, has asked the following:

"Some people think that by criticizing leaders, news organizations keep political leaders from doing their job. Others think that such criticism is worth it because it keeps political leaders from doing things that should not be done. Which position is closer to your opinion?"

This study finds that roughly two-thirds of Americans believe news organizations keep political leaders "from doing things that shouldn't be done." Only about a third worry that the press "keeps political leaders from doing their job."

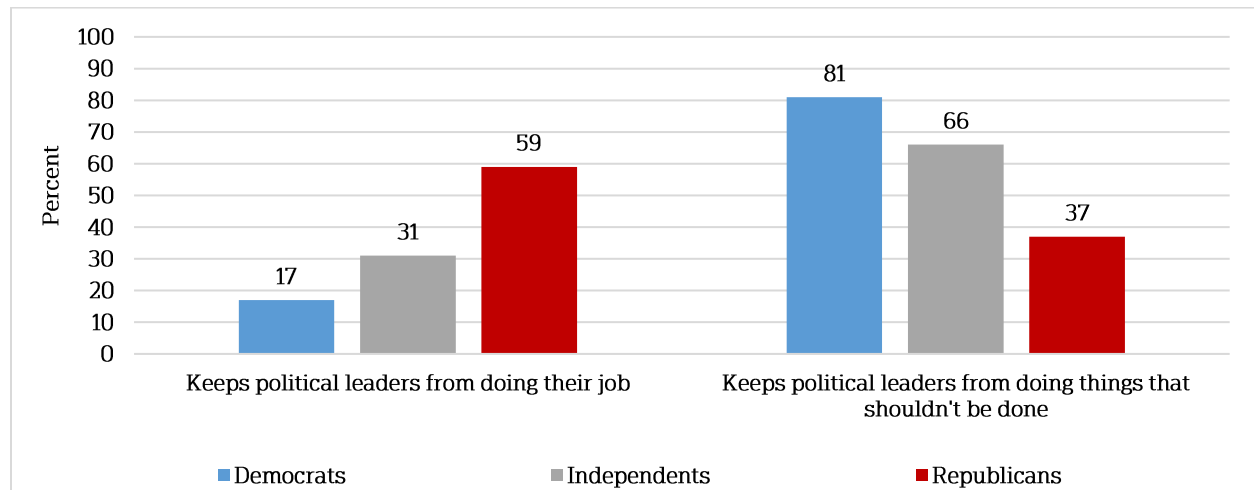
Those numbers are similar to what Pew has found over the years.<sup>8</sup>

But there is a notable partisan divide here. While roughly 8 in 10 Democrats and two-thirds of independents believe news organizations keep political leaders from doing bad things, fewer than 4 in 10 Republicans feel that way.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.people-press.org/2013/08/08/amid-criticism-support-for-medias-watchdog-role-stands-out/>



**Republicans say news organizations keep political leaders from doing their job at higher rates than Democrats or independents.**



Question: Some people think that by criticizing leaders, news organizations keep political leaders from doing their job. Others think that such criticism is worth it because it keeps political leaders from doing things that should not be done. Which position is closer to your opinion?

## POLITICAL DIVISIONS

There are even more striking differences if we look at people by their party identification.

In general, the research finds that Republicans and, to a lesser degree, independents are less trusting of the news media.

But there are substantive and, in some cases, dramatic differences between how Republicans see the media in general and how they see the media they turn to most often.

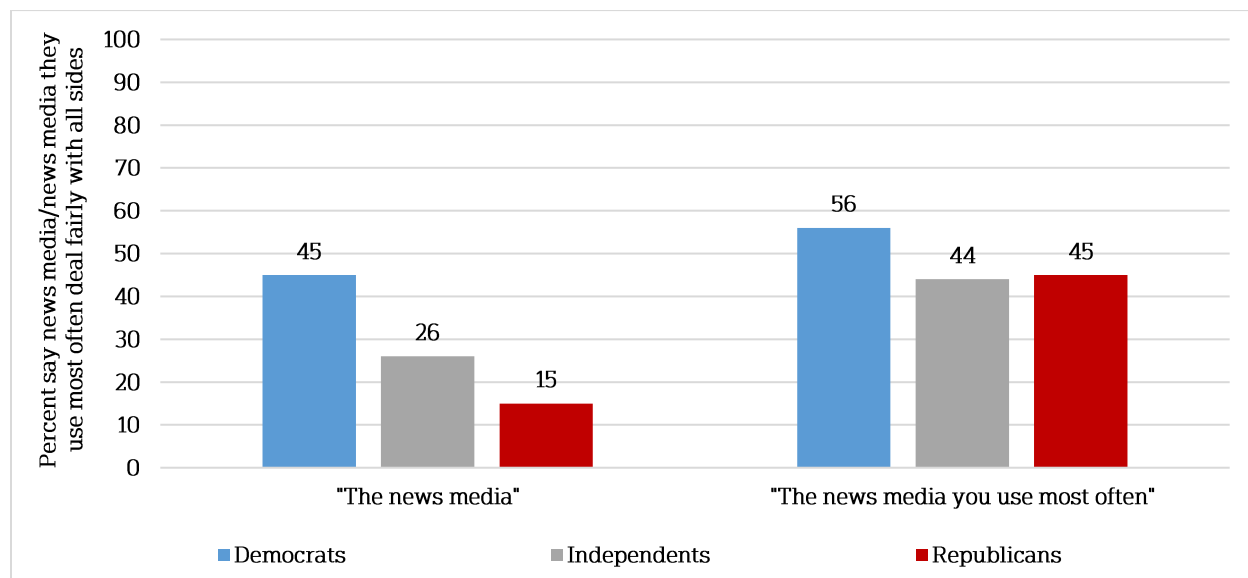
To begin with, only 8 percent of Republicans say they have “a lot of trust” in the information they get from the news media generally. That number jumps to 27 percent if they are asked about the news media they use most often.

There were similarly large shifts in other trust metrics among Republicans depending on whether they discussed the news media in general or the news media they used most often.

For instance, just 15 percent of Republicans think the news media deal fairly with all sides, but 45 percent think the news media they use most often do.



**Democrats are most likely to say the news media generally treat all sides fairly. When asked about the media they use most often, their percentages were still higher than the other groups', but less dramatically so.**

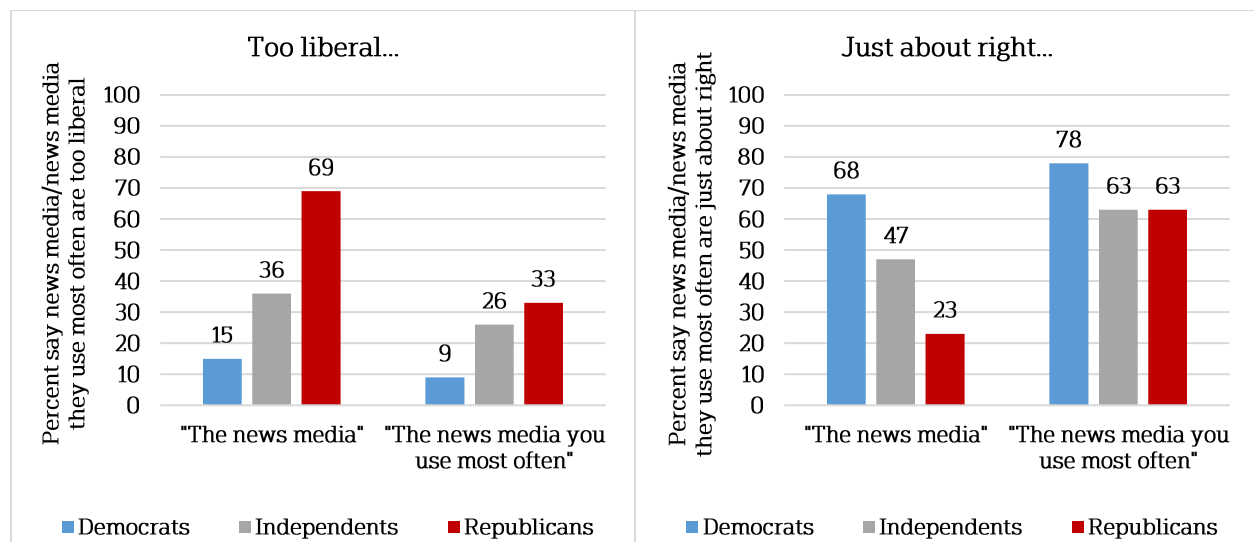


**Question: In presenting the news dealing with political and social issues, do you think that [the news media/the news media you use most often] deal fairly with all sides, or do they tend to favor one side?**

That number also jumps among independents, but not as dramatically—from 26 percent to 44 percent—depending on whether they are asked about the news media in general or the news media they use most often. It also jumps, though less so, among Democrats, from 45 percent to 56 percent.

Are the news media too liberal? Seventy percent of Republicans say the news media are too liberal. Only 23 percent think the news media are “just about right.” But those numbers almost flip when Republicans think about the news media they use most often. Then 33 percent think the media are too liberal and 63 percent think they’re just about right.

**Most Republicans say the news media generally are too liberal, while most Democrats say they are just about right. Majorities of all parties say the news media they use most often are just about right ideologically.**



Question: Do you think [the news media/the news media you use most often] are too liberal, just about right, or too conservative?

**And on a battery of other questions, a similar shift occurs:**

	"The news media"			"The news media you use most often"		
	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Care about the people they report on	33	16	13	46	36	43
Are willing to admit their mistakes	47	20	8	55	43	43
Are moral	41	15	14	59	44	57
Protect democracy	52	26	18	57	42	46

Just 13 percent of Republicans think the news media care about the people they report on, but 43 percent think that about the media they use most often, a number similar to Democrats' 46 percent.

Just 8 percent of Republicans think the media admit their mistakes, but 43 percent think the media they rely on most do.

Just 14 percent of Republicans say the news media are moral, but 57 percent think the media they use are.

And 18 percent of Republicans think the media protect democracy, but 46 percent think the media they use do so.

Independents also have a higher opinion of the news media when asked about the media they use most often, but they are less trusting than Republicans in some instances.

For example, 36 percent of independents think the media they use most often care about people they report on (up from 16 percent of the media in general).

And, in all, 44 percent of independents say the news media they use most often are moral, fewer than either Republicans (57 percent) or Democrats (59 percent). But that is still a higher number than the 15 percent of independents who feel that way about the news media in general.

Independents are about as likely as Republicans to say the news media they use most often protect democracy (42 percent and 46 percent, respectively), though both are less likely than Democrats (57 percent).

## NEWS MEDIA OUTLETS NAMED BY PARTY

And what are the news media that people of different political affiliations say they turn to most often? Do Republicans look at different media than Democrats and independents do?

The data suggest there is some common ground, but also significant segmentation.

Cable channels such as Fox, CNN, and MSNBC are the most popular form of news for Democrats (37 percent), independents (37 percent), and Republicans (52 percent).

But people with different political affiliations do tend to name different cable channels to some degree. Republicans are more likely to name Fox (40 percent) than either independents (16 percent) or Democrats (7 percent). Democrats, by contrast, are more likely to name CNN (30 percent) than independents (20 percent) or Republicans (18 percent).

So there is some common public square, even in cable news, though it is a limited one.

Broadcast television channels such as ABC, NBC, CBS, and PBS, among others, are also frequently used across the political spectrum, with many Democrats (30 percent), independents (28 percent), and Republicans (23 percent) saying they turn to such sources. But here, the differences among the specific channels are small. About 1 in 10 respondents name any of these specific networks as a news source they rely on often, with similar numbers of Democrats, Republicans, and independents saying they use NBC, CBS, and ABC.

In short, in a segmented media landscape, people are scattered not always because of partisanship, but often by having so many news outlets to choose from.

	Most used	Second-most used	Third-most used
Democrats	CNN (30%)	The New York Times (12%)	NBC (10%)
Republicans	Fox News (40%)	CNN (18%)	NBC (7%)
Independents	CNN (20%)	Fox News (16%)	NBC (7%)

## GENERATIONS AND TRUST

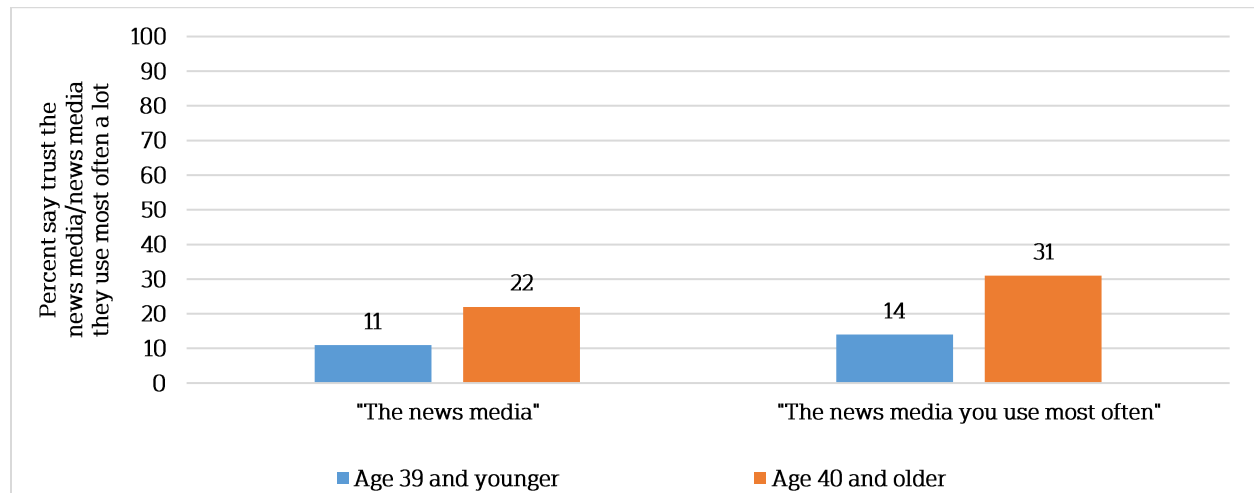
If politics causes a divide in trust, so does age.

In general, regardless of party identification, younger adults are less likely to trust the news media than older adults.

But here again (though not on every metric), those numbers change if people are asked about the media they use most often.

There is not such a marked change, however, on the general trust question we used. For instance, 11 percent of people under age 40 say they trust the information they get from the news media "a lot," about half as many as the 22 percent of people age 40 and older. But the number moves only slightly upward, to just 14 percent of those under 40, who feel a lot of trust with the media they use most often (it moves to 31 percent among those age 40 and older).

**Older Americans are more likely to say they can trust both the news media generally and the news media they use most often.**



**Question:** Thinking of [the news media/the news media you use most often] how much, if at all, do you trust the information you get?

On many other metrics of trust, however, familiarity appears to breed appreciation. As an example, 15 percent of those under age 40 feel "very well informed" by the media generally. That goes up to 23 percent if people are asked about the media they use most, a jump that is about commensurate with the increase for those age 40 and over (where it jumps from 30 percent to 40 percent).

While just 8 percent of those under age 40 feel the media are "very accurate" (75 percent say "somewhat accurate"), the "very accurate" number triples to 25 percent if people are asked about the media they use most often. That is still lower than the 40 percent of those age 40 and older who feel that way about their preferred media sources.

A quarter of those under age 40 feel the media deal fairly with all sides, but 43 percent feel that way about the media they use most, compared to 53 percent of those age 40 and over.

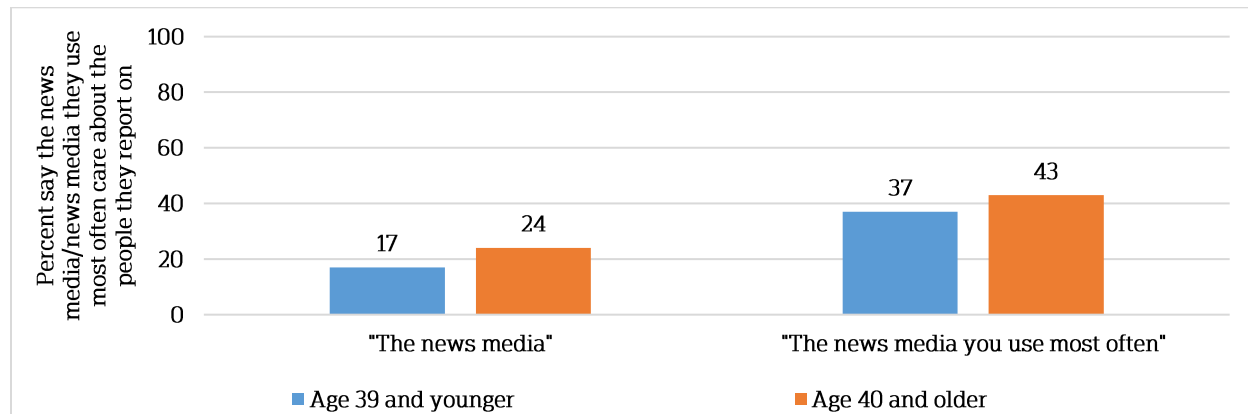
Interestingly, faith in the watchdog role of the media does not shift among younger adults when they think about the media they use most versus the media in general. The number stays at 28 percent. It moves only slightly, from 34 percent to 37 percent, among those age 40 and above.

Is the press too liberal, too conservative, or just about right? The majority of those under age 40 (53 percent) think it's just about right among the media in general, about the same as those who are older (47 percent). And if they are asked about the media they use most often, the two age groups again are in sync. About two-thirds (69 percent of those under 40 and 68 percent of those age 40 and above) think the media they personally use are about right.

On a host of other trust metrics, people in different age groups like the media more when they are asked about the media they use most.

Do the news media care about the people they report on? While 17 percent of those under 40 think that of the press in general, the number more than doubles among this group, to 37 percent, if they are asked about the media they use most often. (It is 24 percent and 43 percent for those age 40 and above).

**Adults of all ages think 'their' media is more caring than the media in general.**

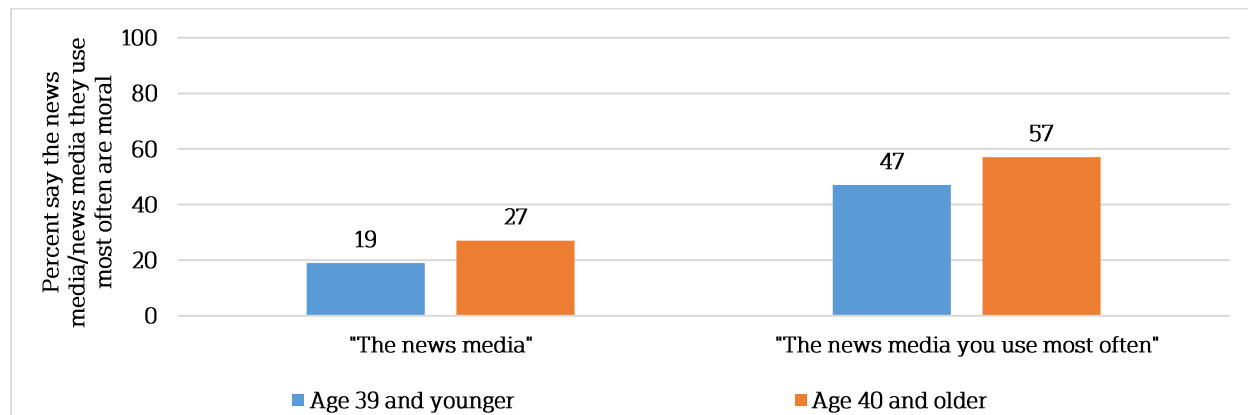


Question: Here are some pairs of opposite phrases. Which phrase do you feel better describes [the news media/the news media you use most often]? Would you say [the news media/the news media you use most often]...

What about willingness to admit mistakes? Less than a quarter of those under 40 (22 percent) think the media in general admit their mistakes, while two-thirds think they try to cover them up. The numbers even out among people under 40 when asked about the media they use most often (39 percent and 40 percent). Among those age 40 and above, 30 percent think the media in general confess their sins and 53 percent think they cover them up; when asked about the news media they use most often, 53 percent think they admit mistakes, while just 27 percent think they don't.

Is the press moral? Just 19 percent of those under 40 say yes about the media in general, a number that jumps to 47 percent when people are asked about the media they use. It also more than doubles among those 40 and above, from 27 percent to 57 percent.

**Older Americans are more likely to say news media are moral.**

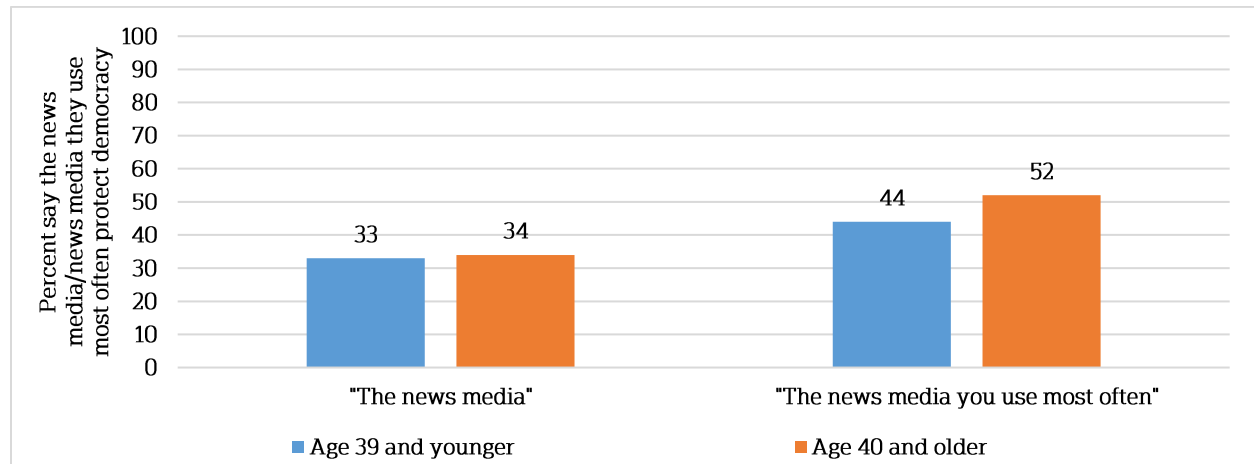


Question: Here are some pairs of opposite phrases. Which phrase do you feel better describes [the news media/the news media you use most often]? Would you say [the news media/the news media you use most often]...

And what about the press helping versus hurting democracy?

A third of those under 40 (33 percent) feel the press help, while a similar number (34 percent) of those age 40 and above feel that way. The numbers jump when people are asked about their own preferred media to 44 percent among those under 40 and to 52 percent among those 40 and above.

**People say the news media they use most often protect democracy at higher rates than the news media generally, with no major differences by age.**



**Question: Here are some pairs of opposite phrases. Which phrase do you feel better describes [the news media/the news media you use most often]? Would you say [the news media/the news media you use most often]...**

## MEDIA SOURCES BY AGE

There are both similarities and differences in the media usage of younger and older adults.

In general, younger adults are more likely to cite digital sources and older adults turn more to television, but there is some overlap.

In all, 8 percent of adults 18 to 39 mention social media as one of the places they turn to for news most often (the question was open-ended), compared to just 1 percent of those age 40 and older. Similarly, 21 percent of adults 18 to 39 cite news websites as a favored news source, compared with 13 percent of those 40 and over.

When it comes to television, nearly half of all adults age 40 and over cite cable news as a major source of news (45 percent) while the number is closer to a third (35 percent) for people age 18 to 39.

Similarly, adults 40 and older are twice as likely as younger ones to report using broadcast television (34 percent vs. 17 percent).

In regard to specific outlets, adults 40 and older are more likely than younger ones to report using Fox (22 percent vs. 14 percent) and MSNBC (7 percent vs. 2 percent), while 23 percent of adults in each age group say they use CNN. Older adults are also more likely to use NBC (10 percent vs. 5 percent) and CBS (9 percent vs. 1 percent), while about 5 percent of both age groups use ABC.

	Most used	Second-most used	Third-most used
Age 39 and younger	CNN (23%)	Fox News (14%)	The New York Times (8%)
Age 40 and older	CNN (23%)	Fox News (22%)	NBC (10%)

## OPINION VERSUS NEWS

One possible explanation for an overall decline in trust is that parts of the media, especially TV, have blurred the distinction between opinion and straight news reporting. If some people dislike certain commentators, or tire of pundits' speculations, that may drag down their opinion of otherwise trustworthy news reporting.

The survey probed the degree to which people believe they can distinguish between opinion and news reporting in the media they encounter.

In the media generally, a majority of people say they find it at least "somewhat" easy to know the difference between news and opinion (21 percent say "very" easy and 33 percent "somewhat"). Those numbers rise slightly when people are asked about the news media they rely on most (to 26 percent saying "very" easy and 36 percent saying "somewhat," for a total of 62 percent).

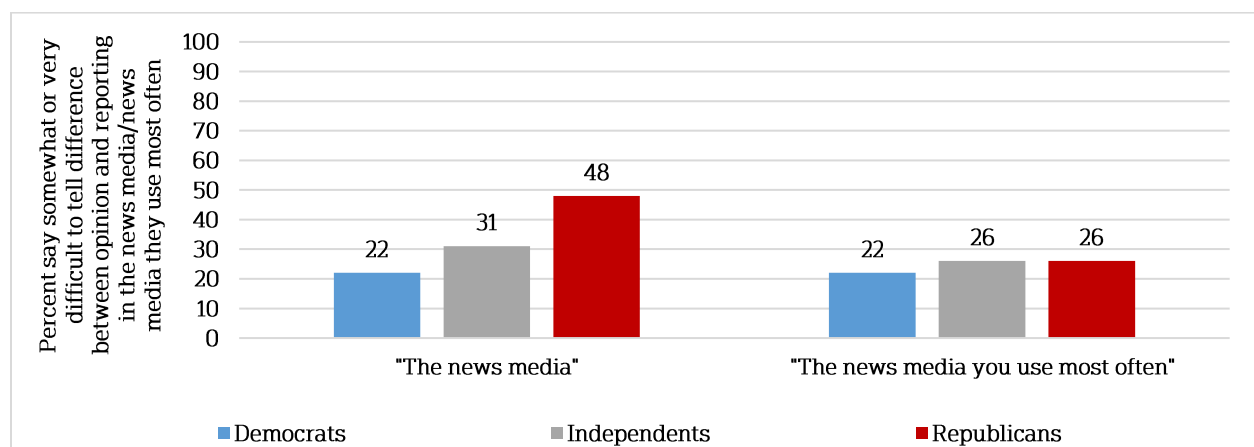
But the question still identifies a fair amount of doubt in both groups. For the media in general, a third (32 percent) say they find it very or somewhat difficult to tell the difference between news and opinion. Another 14 percent say they do not care about that distinction.

For those asked about the media they rely on most, 25 percent say they find it at least somewhat difficult to distinguish between news and opinion. Once again, 14 percent say the distinction doesn't matter to them.

Interestingly, age does not make an enormous difference on this issue. Both for adults under 40 and those 40 and over, 56 percent and 53 percent, respectively, say they think they can fairly easily distinguish between news and opinion. If people are asked about the news they rely on most, the number grows to 65 percent for those 40 and above.

Party identification affects answers more markedly. Republicans are more likely to find it hard to distinguish between news and opinion in the news media in general. Nearly half of Republicans say it is at least somewhat difficult (36 percent "somewhat" and 12 percent "very"), compared to just one in five Democrats (18 percent "somewhat" and 3 percent "very"). Independents are in the middle, with 31 percent saying it is difficult (22 percent "somewhat" and 9 percent "very").

### Republicans find it hard to tell news from opinion in the media generally, but party differences disappear when people are asked about media they use.



**Question:** Many news organizations produce opinion content as well as report the news. How easy or difficult is it for you to tell the difference between the opinion content and news reporting in [the news media/the news media you use most often], or does it not matter to you?



The differences by party identification in this question are less pronounced when people consider the news media they regularly consult. Just 26 percent of Republicans say it is difficult to tell reporting from opinion content among these sources, a number that is the same for independents. A similar number of Democrats find it at least somewhat difficult (22 percent).

On the other side of this question, about 6 in 10 Democrats say they feel they fairly easily distinguish between news and opinion (34 percent "somewhat" and 30 percent "very") in the news media they use. That is the same as the numbers for Republicans (40 percent "somewhat" easily and 24 percent "very"), and similar to the numbers for independents (34 percent "somewhat" and 23 percent "very").

## METHODOLOGY

This survey experiment was conducted by the Media Insight Project, an initiative of the American Press Institute (API) and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The survey was conducted from March 8 through March 27, 2017. The survey was funded by API. Staff from API, NORC at the University of Chicago, and AP collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak Panel, which is NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, nonzero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face).

Interviews for this survey were conducted with adults age 18 and over, representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from the AmeriSpeak Panel, and 2,036 completed the survey via the web and phone. There were 1,702 completed interviews via the web and 334 via the phone. The final stage completion rate is 35.6 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 34.4 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 94.7 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 11.6 percent.

The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.0 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error for the "news media" experimental group is +/- 4.2 percentage points while the margin of error for the "news media you use most often" experimental group is +/- 4.0 percentage points.

Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive (\$2) for completing the survey. All interviews were conducted in English by professional interviewers, who were carefully trained on the specific survey for this study.

Once the sample was selected and fielded, and all the study data had been collected and made final, a poststratification process was used to adjust for any survey nonresponse as well as any noncoverage or under- and over-sampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, Census region, race/ethnicity, and education. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

Details about the Media Insight Project can be found at: [www.mediainsight.org](http://www.mediainsight.org).

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## ABOUT THE MEDIA INSIGHT PROJECT

The Media Insight Project is a collaboration of the American Press Institute and the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with the objective of conducting high-quality, innovative research meant to inform the news industry and the public about various important issues facing journalism and the news business. The Media Insight Project brings together the expertise of both organizations and their respective partners, and involves collaborations among key staff at API, NORC at the University of Chicago, and The Associated Press.

## ABOUT THE AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE

The American Press Institute (API) conducts research and training, convenes thought leaders, and creates tools to help chart a path ahead for journalism in the 21st century. API is an educational nonadvocacy 501(c)3 nonprofit organization affiliated with the News Media Alliance. It aims to help the news media—especially local publishers and newspaper media—advance in the digital age.

## ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS-NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

The Associated Press (AP) is the world's essential news organization, bringing fast, unbiased news to all media platforms and formats.

NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest and most respected independent research institutions in the world.

The two organizations have established the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.

The founding principles of the AP-NORC Center include a mandate to preserve carefully and protect the scientific integrity and objectivity of NORC and the journalistic independence of AP. All work conducted by the Center conforms to the highest levels of scientific integrity to prevent any real or perceived bias in the research. All of the work of the Center is subject to review by its advisory committee to help ensure it meets these standards. The Center will publicize the results of all studies and make all datasets and study documentation available to scholars and the public.