



© 2014 iStock/anouchka

Americans and the News Media: What they do — and don't — understand about each other

New research reveals miscommunication, dissatisfaction — and opportunities

June 2018

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS REPORT:

Eric Young, Public Affairs Manager, NORC

301-634-9536

Young-Eric@norc.org

www.mediainsight.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	1
Implications	3
About the study	4
WHAT THE PUBLIC EXPECTS FROM THE PRESS (AND WHAT JOURNALISTS THINK)	4
The public and journalists expect the same things from the news media. The public just doesn't think it's getting it	4
How hard it is to distinguish news from opinion	7
WHAT AMERICANS KNOW, AND DON'T, ABOUT HOW JOURNALISM WORKS	9
Most people know what anonymous sources are, but not why journalists use them	11
What people think the term "fake news" really means	13
What journalists think of fake news	15
Transparency as a way of increasing trust	16
The public is somewhat positive about what drives journalists to cover a story	18
HOW DOES PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH NEWS AFFECT A PERSON'S VIEWS?	19
Education and hands-on experience factor into trust and understanding	19
How interactions with journalists or involvement in news coverage affects understanding and trust in news	21
Journalists interact with the public more frequently on social media than through interviews	24
LEVELS OF TRUST AND HOW AMERICANS FEEL ABOUT THE FAIRNESS AND ACCURACY OF THE PRESS	25
Trust in the media overall has declined in the last year, but people's trust in their favorite news outlets has grown	25
How Republicans and Democrats view press accuracy	30
Where do Americans think the news industry is going?	31
The public is divided on whether the media protects or hurts democracy	31
HOW AMERICANS DESCRIBE THEIR NEWS CONSUMPTION BEHAVIORS	33
Americans say they frequently scan headlines and also read stories in-depth, but pay attention to opinion content less often	33
ARE NEWSPAPER SUBSCRIBERS MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE OR APPROVING OF THE NEWS MEDIA?	35
Newspaper subscribers hold more positive views of many specific types of media – and have an easier time deciphering news from opinion – than do non-subscribers	35
While subscribers are more likely to think the media protects democracy, they agree the industry is headed in the wrong direction	37
HOW YOUNGER AND OLDER AMERICANS UNDERSTAND AND INTERACT WITH NEWS	37
Older Americans have more positive views about the accuracy and trustworthiness of the media	37
Older adults have more positive views of TV news outlets, while younger adults tend to have more favorable attitudes toward social media	39
Although young adults are more likely to have taken a media literacy class or started a blog, older adults report more familiarity with common journalistic terms	40

HOW MUCH REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS TRUST OR UNDERSTAND THE NEWS MEDIA.....42

Partisanship drives perceptions, trust, and opinions toward media 42

Keeping up with the news, seeking it out, and using favorite sources..... 42

Democrats are generally more positive, even when it comes to their own preferred news sources..... 42

Partisans diverge somewhat on how they want the news covered. They differ even more on how they think news is actually covered..... 44

In general, Democrats find it easier to differentiate opinion and news. Across parties, Americans agree that more information about sources is key to improving trust..... 45

There are sharp differences in general perceptions of the news industry across parties. 47

Partisans agree on some definitions of the term “fake news,” and disagree on others. 47

Partisans do agree on some priorities for the news industry, though Democrats place higher levels of importance on several potential media roles. 48

METHODOLOGY 50

General Public Survey 50

Journalist Survey..... 50

Contributing Researchers..... 53

Acknowledgements..... 53

About The Media Insight Project..... 53

About The American Press Institute..... 53

About The Associated Press-NORC Center For Public Affairs Research..... 54

OVERVIEW

A key factor in the erosion of Americans' trust of their news media is a failure to communicate – we have a public that doesn't fully understand how journalists work, and journalism that doesn't make itself understandable to much of the public.

This fundamental pattern emerges from a new study by the Media Insight Project. We conducted twin surveys of both the public and journalists, asking each group parallel questions about the public's understanding of journalistic concepts, the public's interactions with journalists, and how all of that affects people's assessment of the news media.

The findings released today reveal problems of miscommunication, as well as opportunities. They highlight shared ideals: for example, the public and journalists want the same things from the press – verified facts, supplemented by some background and analysis. But they also reveal dissatisfaction: many Americans think what they see in the news media looks largely like opinion and commentary – not the carefully reported contextualizing they hoped for.

Moreover, the public is confused by some basic concepts of news. Half do not know what an “op-ed” is. More than 4 in 10 do not know what the term “attribution” means, and close to 3 in 10 do not know the difference between an “editorial” and a “news story.”

Journalists we surveyed expect some of these results. They think the public has an even lower opinion of journalists, are less able to grasp basic concepts, and are more passive in their news consumption.

Despite the fact that the individual journalists we surveyed say they are aware of, and even overestimate, the level of the public's misunderstanding of their craft, the broader news industry still has to act on that knowledge – through steps such as transparency, labeling, eliminating jargon, and letting the public participate in the news.

The good news is that progress seems achievable. In addition to shared ideals, the survey finds a substantial desire on the part of both journalists and the public for more transparency.

The public is especially interested in hearing more about sources and individual story decisions. For example, even though a majority of Americans understand what anonymous sourcing is, most also think that even their favorite news organizations should better explain their use of unnamed sources.

People also generally are more frequent, deeper, and more active news consumers than journalists give them credit for. And the public trusts their favorite sources of news and individual reporters more than journalists think they do.

The bottom line: The public is ready for a relationship with more understanding and trust, if news media can take the right steps to earn it.

Americans and the News Media: Key trends at a glance

THE PUBLIC AND JOURNALISTS SHARE SOME EXPECTATIONS
63% OF PEOPLE PREFER NEWS COVERAGE WITH MOSTLY FACTS AND SOME ANALYSIS AND 66% OF JOURNALISTS EXPECT THIS IS WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS
BUT THE PUBLIC DOESN'T SEE WHAT IT EXPECTS
42% THINK NEWS THEY SEE VEERS TOO FAR INTO COMMENTARY 35% HAVE A VERY OR SOMEWHAT NEGATIVE VIEW OF NEWS ORGANIZATIONS IN GENERAL
PEOPLE ARE CONFUSED OVER SOME BASIC NEWS CONCEPTS
50% ARE NOT SURE WHAT AN "OP-ED" IS 43% DO NOT KNOW WHAT THE TERM "ATTRIBUTION" MEANS 42% DO NOT UNDERSTAND HOW ANONYMOUS SOURCING WORKS
THE PUBLIC AND JOURNALISTS AGREE ON WAYS TO INCREASE TRUST
68% OF PEOPLE SAY THE MEDIA SHOULD OFFER MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SOURCES AND 66% OF JOURNALISTS AGREE 48% OF PEOPLE SAY JOURNALISTS SHOULD EXPLAIN HOW A STORY WAS REPORTED AND 42% OF JOURNALISTS AGREE 44% OF PEOPLE SAY NEWS ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD EXPLAIN THEIR POLICIES BETTER AND 48% OF JOURNALISTS AGREE

These are some of the findings in this unusual pairing of surveys of journalists and the public. We explored several different and more nuanced dynamics that come into play in trust, familiarity, news literacy, and transparency.

- **Generally, the public and journalists agree on what kind of journalism they want — verified facts, supplemented by some background and analysis.** The public (87 percent) and journalists (99 percent) agree that most of all the press should verify the facts. When asked what kind of news is most useful, a majority of the public says news reporting that mostly provides facts but also combines some background and analysis to give audiences context.
- **But many Americans think what they see in the news media looks like opinion mongering.** The largest proportion, 42 percent, think most of the news reporting they see is opinion and commentary posing as news reporting — and another 17 percent say news coverage includes too much analysis. Just a third say most of the reporting they see is striking the right balance.
- **There is also substantial confusion on major concepts.** On a battery of nine core journalism terms, a majority of Americans are very familiar with only three of them. Just 28 percent of adults feel comfortable they know what an op-ed is; 30 percent feel confident they know what attribution means in journalism; less than half know the difference between an editorial and a news story. Only 18 percent say they know the term "native advertising."
- **As low as these numbers are, journalists expect even worse.** For example, 15 percent expect the public to know what an op-ed is, and just 9 percent say the public knows what attribution means.
- **Anonymous sourcing deserves more explanation.** A majority of Americans, 58 percent, accurately describe what anonymous sourcing in journalism involves. Just 35 percent say even their favorite news organizations do a good job of explaining it.

- **Trust in preferred news organizations is rising.** And while 56 percent of Americans think journalism is on the wrong track – and 44 percent trust it less than they did a year ago – those numbers look strikingly different when you ask people about the news organizations they use most often. When asked about their favorite news organization, fully 32 percent of Americans trust it more than they did a year ago.

We spotted other interesting trends as well. For example, in a current political context where President Donald Trump’s rhetoric on “fake news” is broad and far-reaching, the meaning of that term to the public includes a range of definitions – everything from fake news organizations making things up, to real news organizations making things up, to all kinds of news organizations passing along unsubstantiated conspiracy theories.

Political polarization is clearly another big challenge to building trust. Republican trust in the media is lower than that of Democrats or independents, and that correlates strongly with Republicans’ feeling that the press covers them inaccurately. In this sense, the challenge is partly a journalistic one.

The trust challenge is also complicated by age. Younger Americans who grew up within a disrupted media landscape are also more skeptical of the media, almost as skeptical as Republicans. Most adults age 18 to 29 view the news as fairly inaccurate, while most age 30 and above consider it fairly accurate.

IMPLICATIONS

Several implications for the news industry emerge from this report.

The predominant view among the public that news veers too far into commentary and opinion suggests that journalists should reassess their attempts to interpret the facts they are presenting. While majorities do prefer news that is mostly facts with some background and analysis, many think most news actually seems like opinion.

In addition, the study shows that the public is open to trusting the media more – and to achieve this the media can increase transparency, clarity, and explanation of sources. Those efforts also could be essential in addressing fake news and misinformation, which both the public and journalists consider a major problem.

The low opinion journalists have of their audience may be a major underlying factor that gets in the way of winning back trust. As journalists and their news organizations pursue strategies to improve their relationship with the public, it’s worth noting that the public’s views and behaviors may not be as simplistic or dim as journalists make them out to be.

Efforts to increase media literacy also suggest a way forward. We see in the survey results that public respondents with personal media experience – especially those who have taken a course on the topic or participated in media at their schools – have a better understanding of journalistic terms, more positive views of several types of media, and in many cases an easier time differentiating news and opinion. However, they have similar levels of trust and views about the direction of the news industry.

So journalism education correlates with deeper understanding, but even educated news consumers see flaws in today’s journalism. This underscores even further that efforts to verify the facts, increase transparency, and provide more clarity may help close the communication gap between the news media and the public.

ABOUT THE STUDY

The two surveys in this study were conducted by the Media Insight Project, an initiative of the American Press Institute and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. The general population survey of 2,019 adults using NORC's AmeriSpeak® Panel was conducted from March 21 through April 17, 2018, via the web and telephone. The survey of 1,127 journalists was conducted from March 1 through April 12, 2018, via the web. The study was designed to reach a representative sample of newsroom personnel with editorial or reporting responsibilities. To reach this target population, we drew a sample across different types of outlets and job titles, using a database of media contacts maintained by Cision Media Research. The sample was drawn along three dimensions – job title, outlet type, and whether the outlet was a national or local organization. Poststratification weighting variables to adjust for nonresponse included media outlet and whether the outlet the respondent worked for was considered a national or local organization. The overall margin of sampling error for the general population survey is +/- 3.0 percentage points, and for the survey of journalists it is +/- 3.5 percentage points. The detailed methodology is found at the end of this report.

WHAT THE PUBLIC EXPECTS FROM THE PRESS (AND WHAT JOURNALISTS THINK)

THE PUBLIC AND JOURNALISTS EXPECT THE SAME THINGS FROM THE NEWS MEDIA. THE PUBLIC JUST DOESN'T THINK IT'S GETTING IT.

What do people want from journalists? Above all, the public says it wants accuracy – for the media to verify and get the facts right. Fully 87 percent rank that as extremely or very important, higher than any other item.

People also want journalists to be fair to all sides (78 percent), to be neutral (68 percent), and to provide diverse points of view (61 percent).

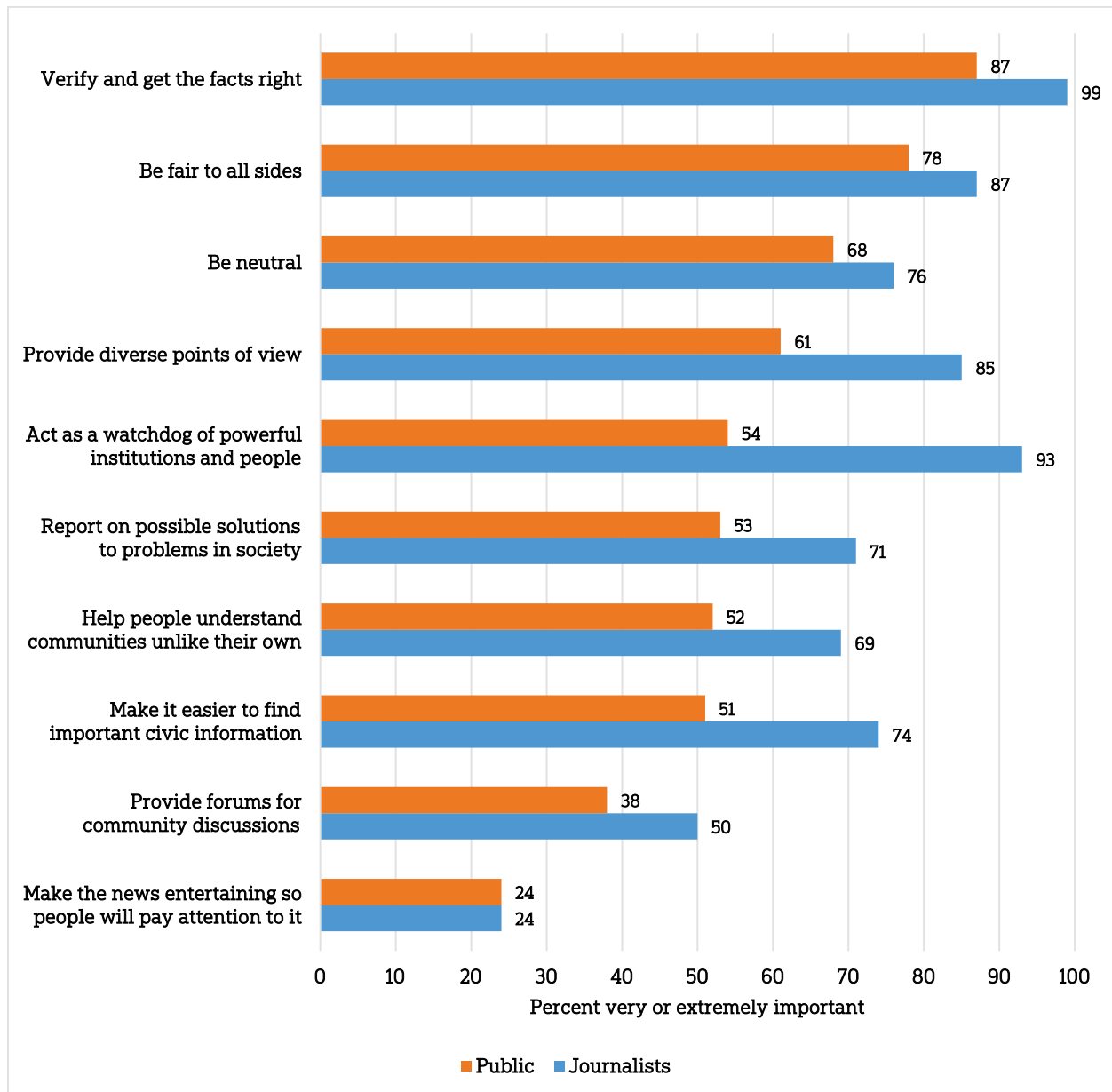
A majority (54 percent) also say it is extremely or very important for the press to be a watchdog over the powerful. Thirty percent consider that somewhat important, and another 15 percent not very important.¹

These rankings are similar to what journalists think they should be doing. On most items, in fact, the numbers are even higher for journalists.

The most striking difference between public expectations of the press and journalists' expectations came on the watchdog role: While just over half of the public considers it extremely/very important, fully 93 percent of journalists rank it so.

¹ On several questions in this battery, there were significant differences in opinion by party, age, and other demographic groups. For example, on this particular item about the media's role as a watchdog, the political and demographic differences are notable. Sixty four percent of Democrats say the watchdog role is extremely/very important, compared to 50 percent of Republicans and 39 percent of independents. In terms of age, adults age 45 and older (61 percent) are more likely than adults under age 45 (45 percent) to think the watchdog role is important. And whites (58 percent) are more likely than blacks (42 percent) and Hispanics (46 percent) to say this is important. Finally, education is also a differentiator, with a divide between those with no college (48 percent) and college (66 percent). Later in this report key political and generational differences are provided in more detail.

What the public and journalists think the news media should do



Question: "Next, indicate how important you think each item is for the news media to try to do."

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

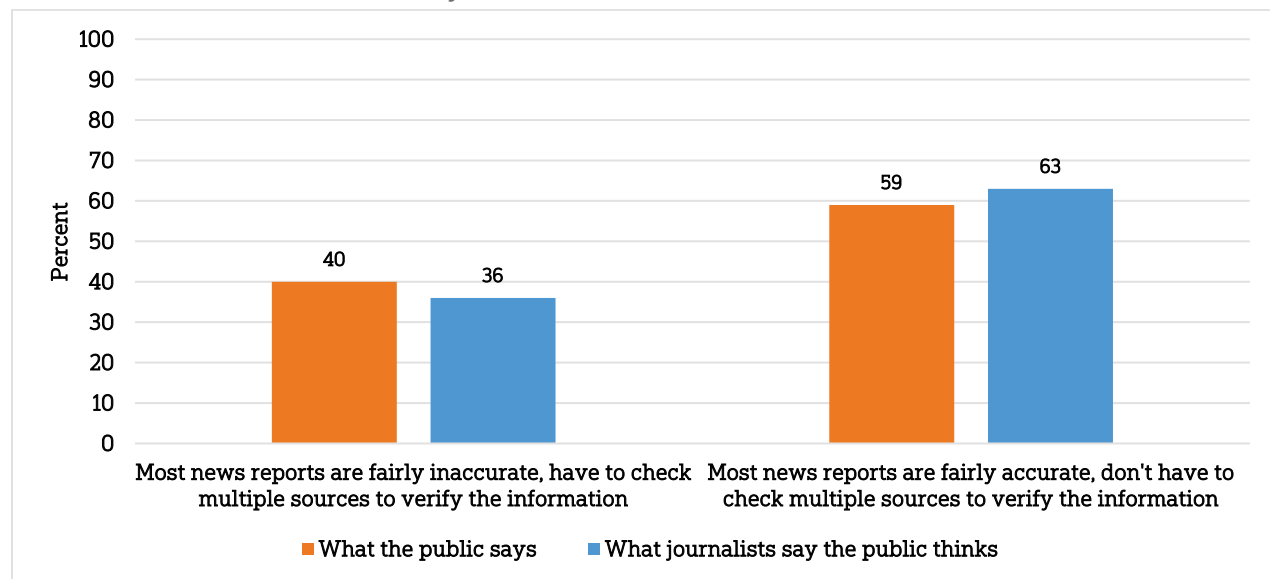
Knowing that people think accuracy is the most important thing and journalists agree – does the public think the news media are accurate?

We asked a new question developed for this survey: If people have to choose, do they say that the press is basically accurate and they can trust what they see? Or do they think that the press is fairly inaccurate and they need to check multiple sources to know what's true?

In all, 6 in 10 people consider most news reports accurate enough that they can trust them and don't have to check multiple sources to verify information. Four in 10 have the opposite view – that news reports are pretty inaccurate, so much so that they feel they need to check multiple sources to verify information before they know what to believe.

Journalists we surveyed were very close to anticipating how the public feels about this question.

How do Americans view the accuracy of most news?



Question: "Choose the statement that best describes how you view the news, even if it is not exactly right. In general..."

Question: "Which of the following statements comes closest to describing how you think most Americans view the news?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

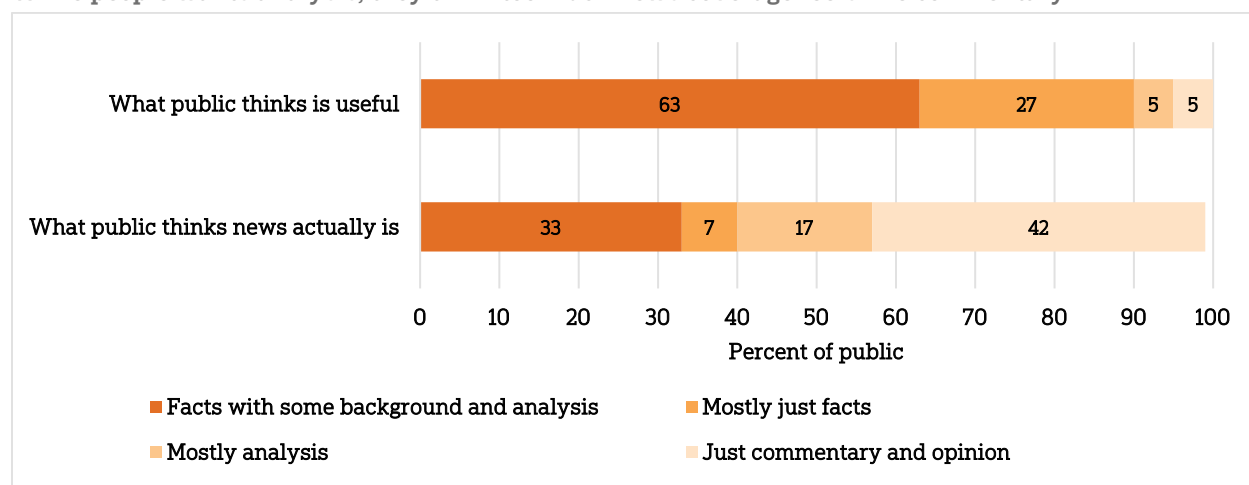
We also asked the public a related question, about what kinds of coverage they find most useful. We asked them to select a preference from four basic choices:

- news coverage that mostly just reports the facts
- news coverage that mostly reports facts with some background and analysis
- news coverage that is mostly analysis
- commentary and opinion

The findings are striking. People want facts, but they want more than just the facts. More than 6 in 10, 63 percent, say they want news coverage that is mostly facts but includes some background and analysis.

By contrast, just over a quarter, 27 percent, say the press should stick strictly to the facts.²

² This question, asked with four response options, is a different result than a Pew Research Center poll conducted in 2016. Offering two choices, Pew found that 59 percent of adults think the media should present the facts without interpretation, and 40 percent prefer facts presented with interpretation. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/18/news-media-interpretation-vs-facts/>

While people want analysis, they think too much news coverage feels like commentary

Question: "Next, thinking about when you watch, read, or hear the news, which of the following best describes what you find most useful..."

Question: "Now, we'd like to ask you about the content of news coverage specifically. Putting aside pure commentary and opinion pieces, which of the following do you think best describes news coverage these days?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

But by and large, the public doesn't think the media is giving them mostly facts with only some background analysis. When we asked people what best describes most of the news content they see – putting aside pure commentary and opinion pieces – only 33 percent describe most of the news coverage they see as providing mostly facts with just some background and analysis. Only 7 percent say most of the news they see is just the facts.

Instead, the largest group of people consider most news coverage they see as far more opinionated. Forty-two percent of adults think most news seems like commentary and opinion, posing as news. And another 17 percent think most news coverage includes too much analysis.

In other words, people want context and background in their news coverage – and journalists want to provide it. But the majority of the public thinks the press has veered too far toward opinion.

This stands out as a major gap – and both a challenge and an opportunity for journalists. Journalists need to take a hard look at their attempts to contextualize the news or add analysis and interpretation. Have they just become another round of commentators?

HOW HARD IT IS TO DISTINGUISH NEWS FROM OPINION

We took this question of separating news versus opinion one step further and asked people how difficult it is for them to identify the difference between news and commentary in different kinds of media they might encounter.

For the specific news outlet a person uses most often, most feel they generally have no problem making this distinction. Nearly three-quarters of people (73 percent) find it very or somewhat easy to distinguish news from commentary in their favorite news outlet.

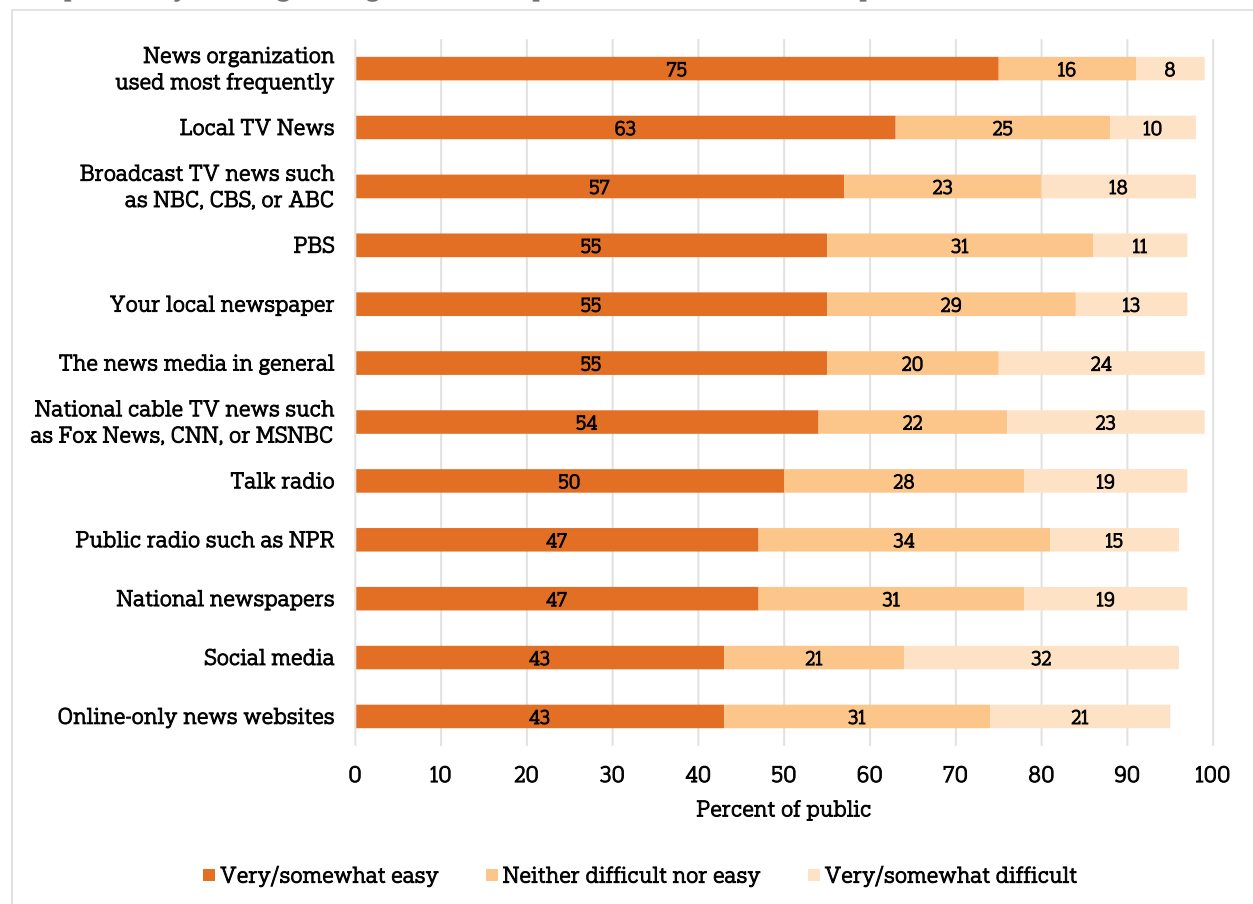
But for all other media types, only about half or less say they can fairly easily make that distinction.

Local television news, which usually contains no formal commentary segments, scores highest. Sixty-three percent say they can tell the difference between news and commentary on local TV news.

For cable news, and the news media in general, the numbers are just over half (54 percent for cable news, 55 percent for the news media generally). Fifty-five percent can also easily tell the difference between news and commentary on PBS, and 47 percent say the same for public radio.

We also asked about social platforms such as Twitter and Facebook – often carrying a mix of commentary and news – and just 43 percent say they find it very or somewhat easy to sort news from commentary on these popular platforms.

The public says distinguishing news from opinion is easiest with their preferred news source



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 each of the following?"

Question: "Now thinking about news you see on social platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, how easy or difficult is it for you to tell the difference between opinion content and news reporting?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

In short, the press clearly needs to do more to clarify what is news, what is opinion, and what is analysis. The public wants it. The press wants to provide it, but has failed to make those distinctions clear enough for the public to understand.

WHAT AMERICANS KNOW, AND DON'T, ABOUT HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

People are strikingly unfamiliar with terms that many journalists use, probably without thinking – such as the difference between an editorial and a news story, what the term “attribution” means, or what an op-ed is.

Consider a few numbers. Fully 50 percent of the public say they are only a little familiar with the term “op-ed,” or don’t know what it is. Just 28 percent of people say they are highly familiar with the term – which refers to content on the opinion pages of newspapers written by columnists and guest writers. The term originally came from print: An op-ed was on the facing or opposite page of the editorials in a newspaper. This is a clear case of old newspaper terminology losing its meaning as we move into new formats.

Yet it is hardly the only concept where there is substantial confusion.

More than 4 in 10 adults (43 percent) say they don’t really know what the term “attribution” means in journalism, quite a bit more than the 30 percent who say they do understand that concept.

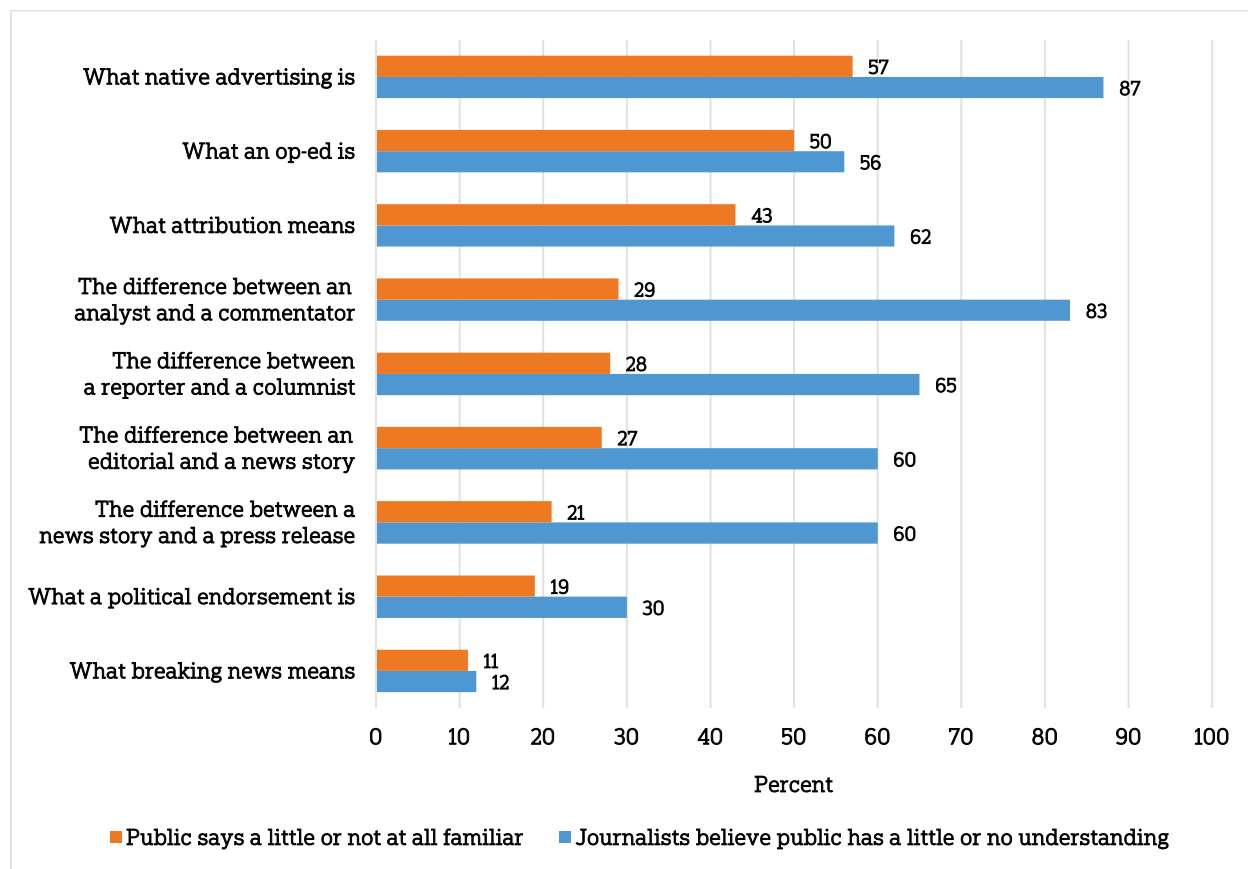
And most people, 57 percent, say they have little or no idea what the term “native advertising,” means, which is also known as “sponsored content” and refer to paid marketing content that resembles other editorial content in the publication. Just 18 percent say they are very or completely familiar with the term.

For publications that hope to maintain the trust of their audience and rely on native advertising as a major source of funding, this finding suggests a good deal more clarity and explanation might be helpful.

On a list of nine fairly basic journalistic terms, a majority of the public say they are very or completely familiar with just three of them: “political endorsement,” “breaking news,” and the difference between a “news story” and a “press release.”

We asked journalists how well they expect the public to grasp some of these terms, and journalists largely expect the public is even more unfamiliar with these core journalistic concepts.

Much of the public does not understand some key journalistic terms — yet journalists expected the results to be even worse



Question: "Next is a list of different terms or concepts that sometimes appear in journalism and media but may or may not be familiar to most people. How familiar are you with each term or concept?"

Question: "Next is a list of different terms or concepts that sometimes appear in journalism and media. For each one, please rate how well you think most Americans understand the difference between the terms or the meaning of the concept."

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

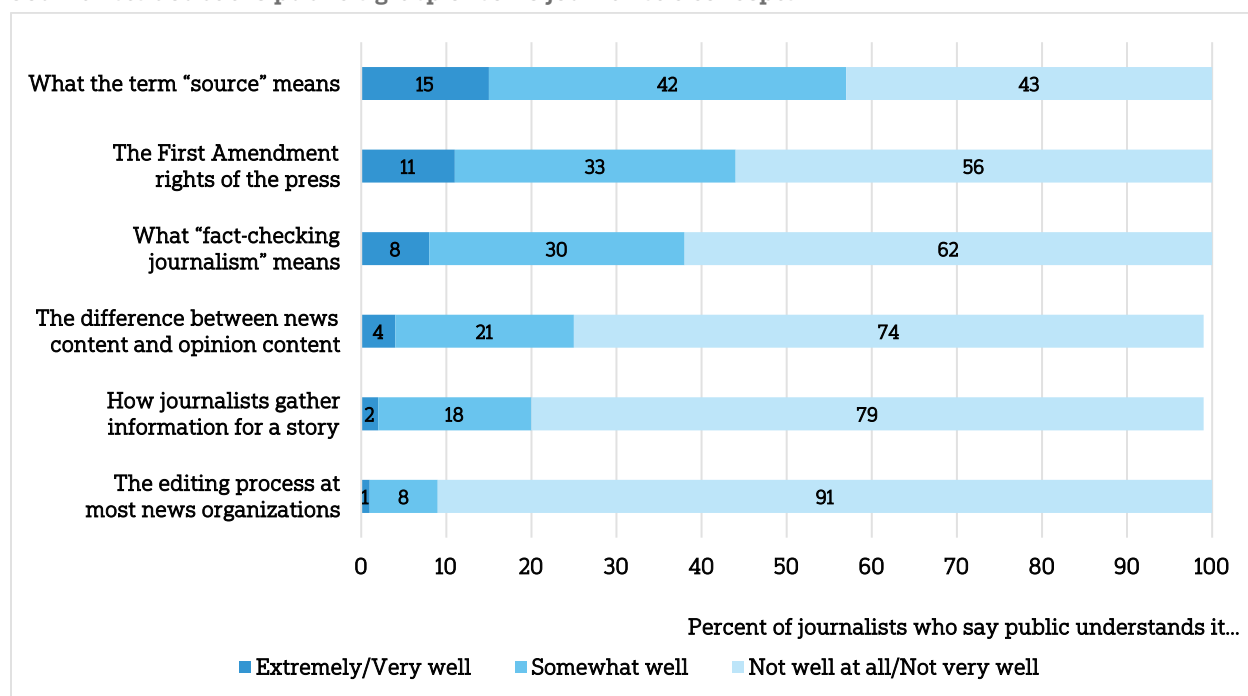
As an example, just 33 percent of journalists expect the public to completely or mostly understand what a political endorsement is. Just 12 percent think the public has a strong grasp of the difference between an editorial and a news story. Only 9 percent of journalists are confident the public knows what the term "attribution" means.

Most journalists are also very skeptical about the public's understanding of other journalism concepts, terms, and processes.

For example, 43 percent of journalists expect the public to have little grasp of what the term "source" means in journalism. More than half of journalists say the public does not understand what an anonymous source is, or understand the First Amendment rights of the press.

Journalists are particularly skeptical that the public knows how they gather information for a story or about the editing process.

Journalists doubt the public's grasp of some journalistic concepts



Question: "How well do you think most Americans understand each of the following concepts of journalism?"
 Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

MOST PEOPLE KNOW WHAT ANONYMOUS SOURCES ARE, BUT NOT WHY JOURNALISTS USE THEM.

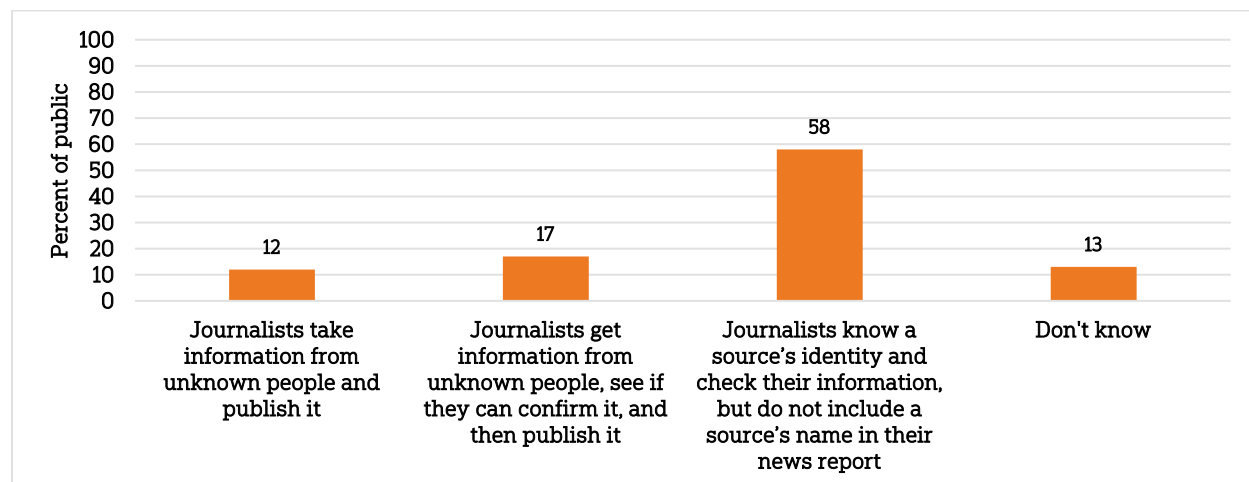
The use of anonymous sources has been complicated and controversial for years. Support for anonymous sources has been tracked in surveys by Gallup, Pew, and others. We wanted to go deeper and see what people understand about what journalists are doing with these sources.

By and large, the result here is more affirming than many journalists expected. A slight majority of the public understands anonymous sourcing.

Fully 58 percent of the public say (correctly) that when journalists refer to anonymous sources it means the journalist knows the source's identity, has checked the information the source provided, and then withheld the source's name in their news report.

Still, a sizable number of people are confused. The other 42 percent of the public are either unsure what an anonymous source is or believe the journalists themselves do not know the source's identity. Of these, 12 percent believe journalists just take information from people whose identities they don't know and then publish it. Another 17 percent think journalists get information from people whose identities are unknown to them, confirm what they are told, and then publish that. Another 13 percent say they don't know or are unsure.

A majority of the public correctly understands anonymous sourcing, but a sizable proportion are still confused



Question: "Which of the following best describes your understanding of how journalists use 'anonymous sources' in their reporting?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

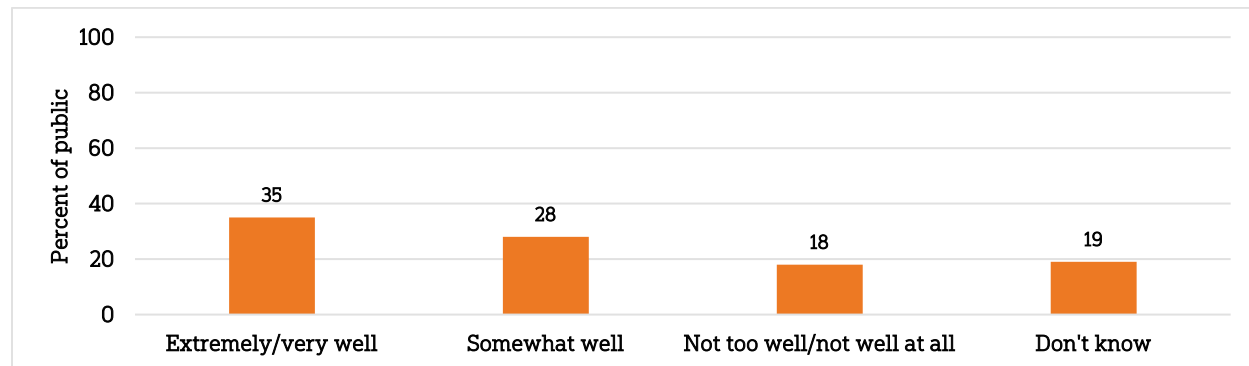
We also went one step further and asked people how well news organizations explain all of this – at least for those respondents who identified by name a news organization they rely on heavily.

The results suggest news organizations should be much clearer than they are now.

Only a little more than a third of people, 35 percent, say their favored news organization does a good job (very or extremely well) explaining its use of anonymous sources.

A larger number, 47 percent, say the news organization they rely on does only somewhat well (28 percent) or not too well/not well at all (18 percent) in explaining what is meant by anonymous sources. And another 19 percent can't say.

Most people do not think their preferred news source explains anonymous sourcing very well



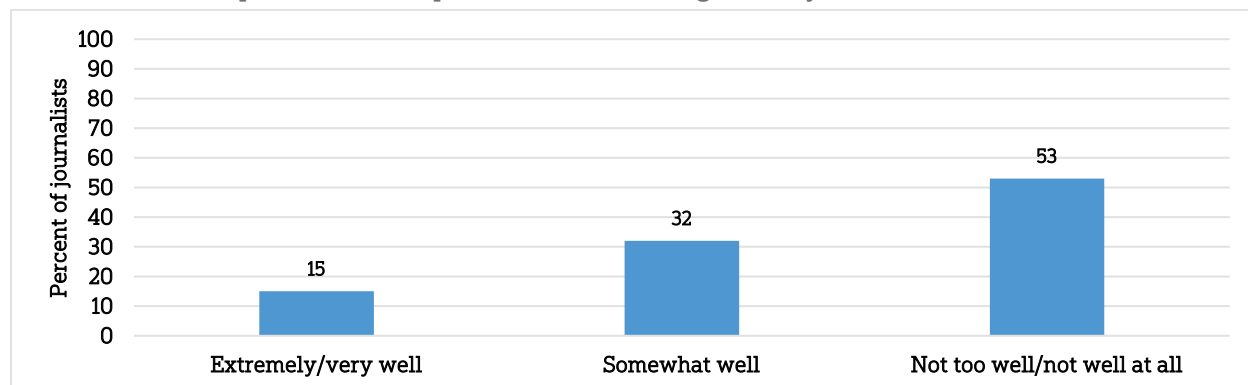
Question: "Thinking of [PREFERRED SOURCE], how well does that news organization explain its uses of anonymous sources?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Yet, that is far better than journalists expect from most of the public.

In our survey of journalists, just 15 percent say they think most adults have an extremely or very good understanding of what the term “anonymous sources” means.

Journalists are skeptical about the public’s understanding of anonymous sources



Question: “How well do you think most Americans understand each of the following concepts of journalism? What ‘anonymous sources’ means.”

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

The use of anonymous sources has been a sore point in [public opinion data about trust](#) for years, going back to the mid-1990s. These latest results suggest that while some news organizations try to offer more information about using unnamed sources than they once did, they have quite a distance to go in making that practice clear to people – which strikes us as a basic precondition before you can even get to the issue of whether people approve of the practice.

WHAT PEOPLE THINK THE TERM “FAKE NEWS” REALLY MEANS

Anonymous sourcing is also related to another area where there may be significant confusion between what journalists do and what the public perceives – fake news.

The term “fake news” entered modern public discourse when Craig Silverman, a BuzzFeed News editor, became one of the first to publicly use the phrase as part of a [research project](#) in 2014. His definition was “completely false information that was created and spread for profit.”

But more recently, President Trump began using the term to mean a variety of things, including stories that he considered unfair or too critical.

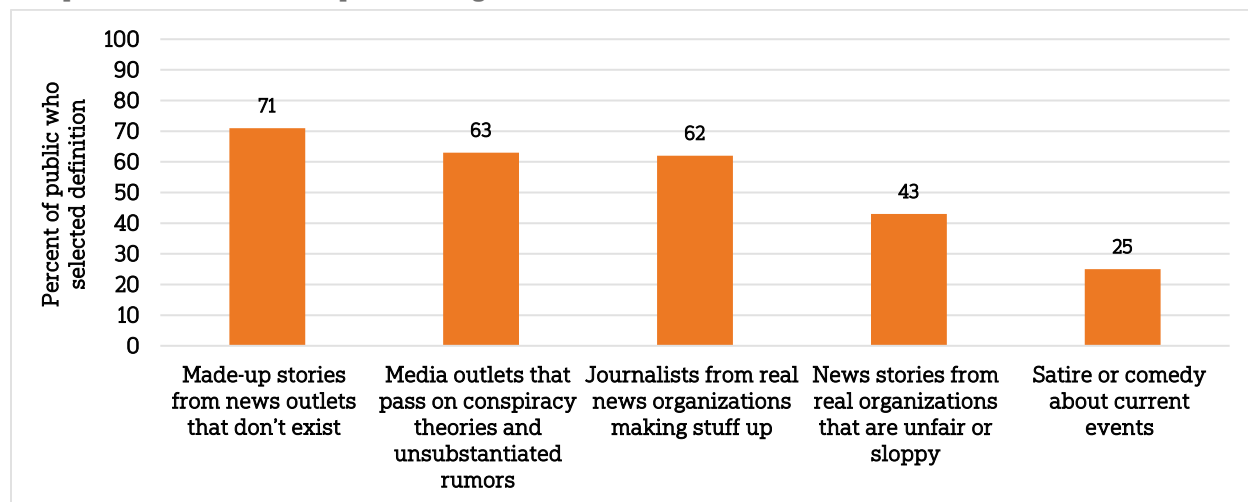
What does the public think the term means now?

To understand what people think fake news is, we asked them to choose among several definitions of the term. Given that a term could mean more than one thing, we offered them the opportunity to select any of the definitions that they think describe fake news.

We found many people now ascribe multiple meanings to the term. While the largest number, 71 percent of the public, think fake news is, “made-up stories from news outlets that don’t exist,” majorities also think it means other things as well. Sixty-two percent think it means “journalists from real news organizations making stuff up.” A similar majority, 63 percent, also think fake news refers to “media outlets that pass on conspiracy theories and unsubstantiated rumors,” which has become a feature of some websites on the political extremes.

A smaller proportion of people (43 percent) think fake news refers to news organizations making sloppy mistakes. Just 25 percent call satire or comedy about current events fake news.

The public associates multiple meanings with the term “fake news”



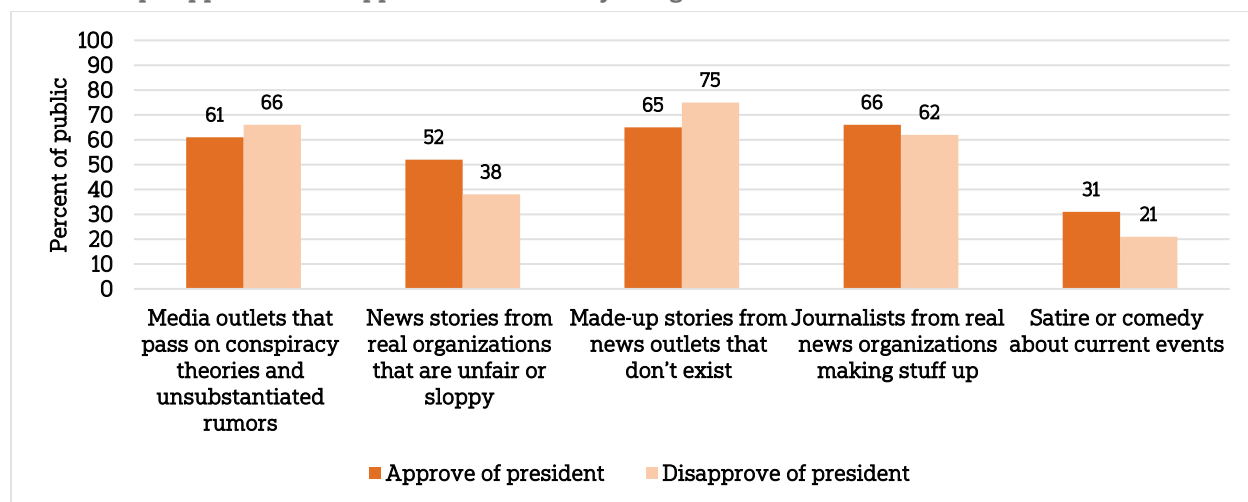
Question: "You may have heard about 'fake news' stories. Which of the following would you call 'fake news'?"
Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

There are also notable differences across several demographic groups in what constitutes fake news.

Naturally, political factors like a person's party affiliation (see the later chapter) or their opinion of Trump makes a big difference.

For example, a majority – 52 percent – of those who approve of the president indicate that news stories from real organizations that are unfair or sloppy constitute fake news, compared to 38 percent of those who disapprove of the president. Finally, supporters of Trump are more likely than those who disapprove of him to say satire or comedy about current events is fake news (31 percent vs. 21 percent, respectively).

Both Trump supporters and opponents label many things “fake news”



Question: "You may have heard about 'fake news' stories. Which of the following would you call 'fake news'?"
Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

All this, however, is largely a matter of terminology. It doesn't tell us how often people think any of these things are going on. How much do people worry about each of these possible forms of fake news?

To a large extent, people think all of these things are a major problem.

Fully half (50 percent) of people who define fake news as real news organizations making things up believe that it is a major problem for the media today, and 33 percent consider it a minor problem. Just 11 percent think it is not a problem.

A slightly larger group, 57 percent, think fake news organizations making up news is a major problem.

Fully two-thirds of those who think fake news is news organizations being sloppy consider that a major problem (67 percent).

And 68 percent of those who think fake news includes news organizations passing along conspiracy theories believe that is a major problem.

The point, however, is now clear. Those who wanted to expand the definition of fake news, to give it multiple meanings and less precision, have prevailed.

WHAT JOURNALISTS THINK OF FAKE NEWS

Where does that leave journalists? They feel mired in this, overwhelmingly.

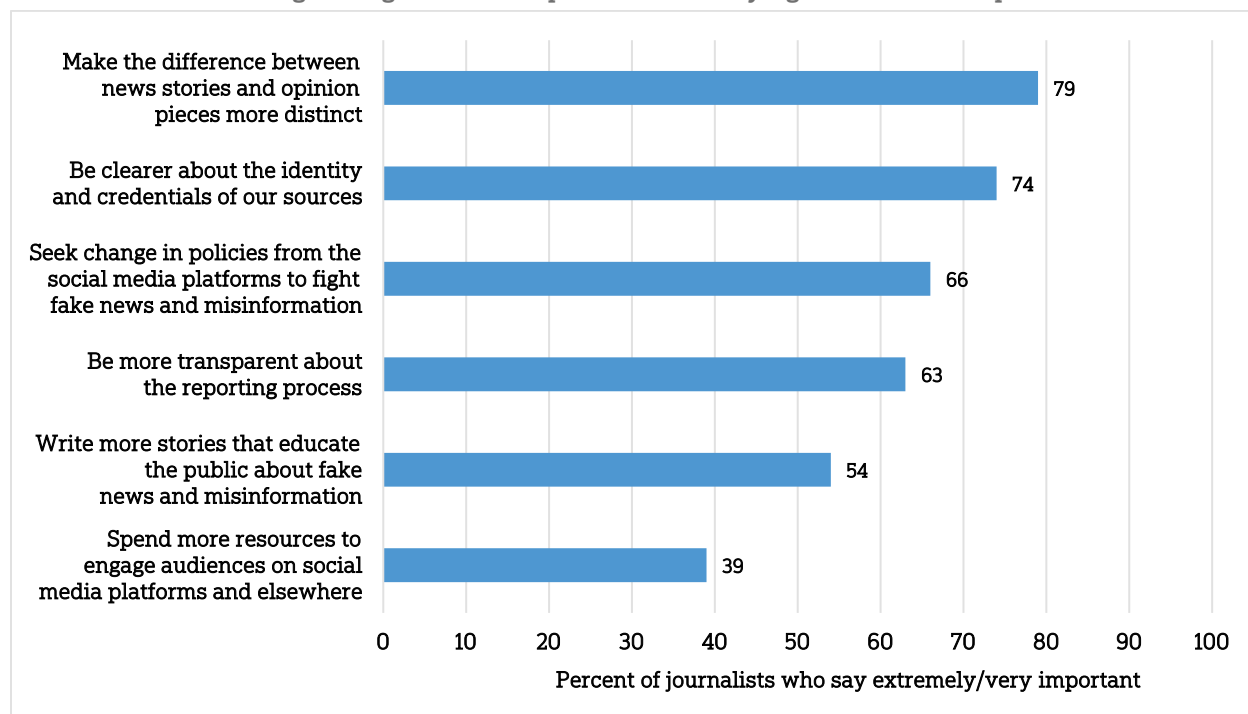
Nearly all journalists (a remarkable 97 percent) think the issue of fake news and misinformation is a problem for the news industry. Indeed, 76 percent call it a major problem.

What can they do about it? Journalists think more clarity between opinion pieces and news, and how they use sources in reporting, are important for addressing the fake news problem. (This would also presumably help the basic problem of confusion over news and opinion.)

We offered journalists a list of transparency methods that have been advocated by journalism reform advocates and scholars, and asked what they think of each. They liked most of them in large numbers.

The two most popular are: Nearly 8 in 10 journalists say their news organization should make the difference between news stories and opinion content more distinct. And 7 in 10 say they should be clearer about the identity and credentials of sources.

Journalists think distinguishing news from opinion and clarifying sources will help combat “fake news”



Question: “To address the issue of fake news and misinformation, how important do you think each of the following actions is for your news organization?”

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

TRANSPARENCY AS A WAY OF INCREASING TRUST

The steps cited above to combat fake news allegations closely relate to another movement gaining force in journalism circles: the idea of journalists [making their work more transparent](#), so that the public can see how the work was done and why they should believe it.

This notion of transparency in journalism is very close, actually, to [the original notion of objectivity](#) in social science – which held not that the scientist had no point of view but that their work methods were done in such a way that they could be understood and replicated by others. Transparency ensured that the researcher’s method was objective, not that the researcher was without a hypothesis they wanted to test or a belief that they held.

In the survey, we asked both journalists and the public about various steps journalists can take to make their work more transparent.

Scholars working in the area of journalism have taken care to research on their own whether efforts by journalists at being more transparent will work. We wanted to probe that as well and see if audiences might respond to different efforts and how that compared to journalists’ attitudes.

In general, there is public support for the idea that [journalists should explain themselves more](#).

But some of these efforts resonate a good deal more with the public than others. And the journalists’ views of these efforts matched remarkably closely.

Among the public, two-thirds of respondents (68 percent) say they think it is extremely or very important for journalists to offer more information about sources or evidence cited in stories. The number of journalists who consider this a critical step to take is almost identical, 66 percent.

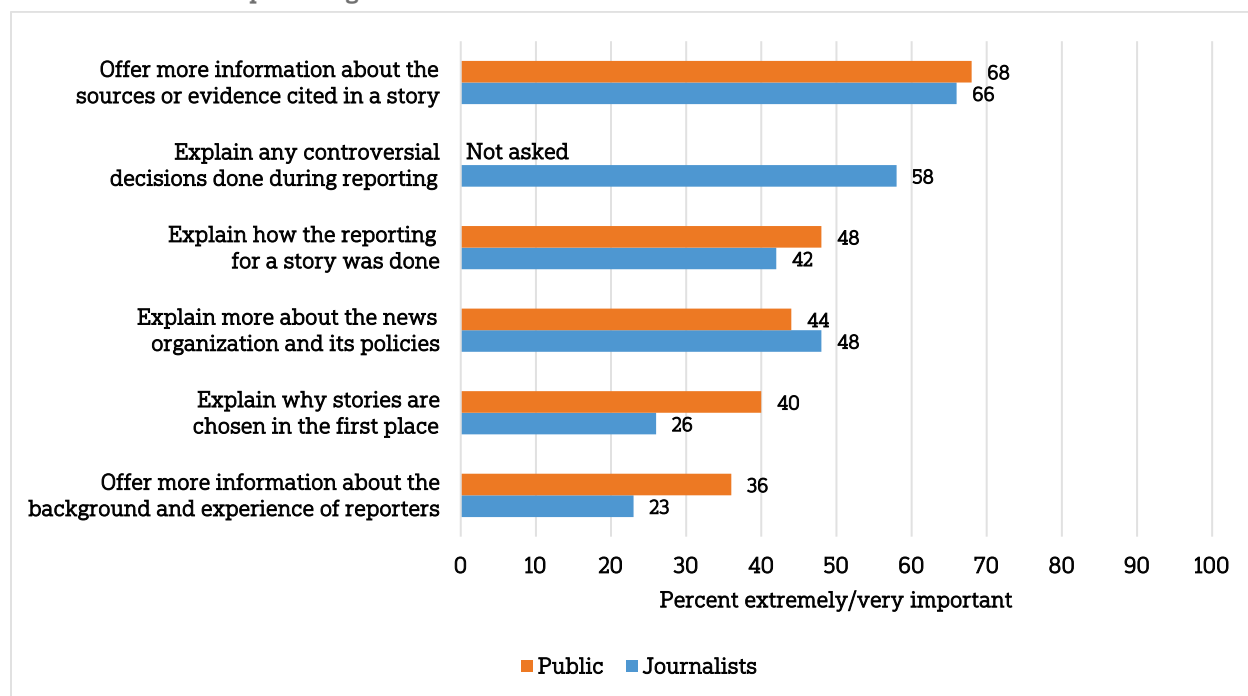
Interestingly, that is the only transparency step both groups were asked about that registers with a majority of respondents thinking it is critically important.

The next option on the list, the idea that journalists should explain how the reporting for a particular story is done, is considered critical to 48 percent of the public and 42 percent of journalists.

At the bottom of both lists is the idea that news organizations should offer more information about the background and experience of reporters. About a third of public respondents (36 percent) and a quarter of journalists (23 percent) think that is a critical step in rebuilding trust.

This doesn't mean these practices are unnecessary or unhelpful, but they may be more useful in the context of some stories than others. It is obvious why some breaking news stories are covered, for instance, and the background of a reporter covering certain kinds of stories may be less pertinent in some cases than others.

Journalists and the public agree more information about sources will increase trust



Question: "There is a lot of talk today about media building trust. How important do you think it is for journalists to do each of the following?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

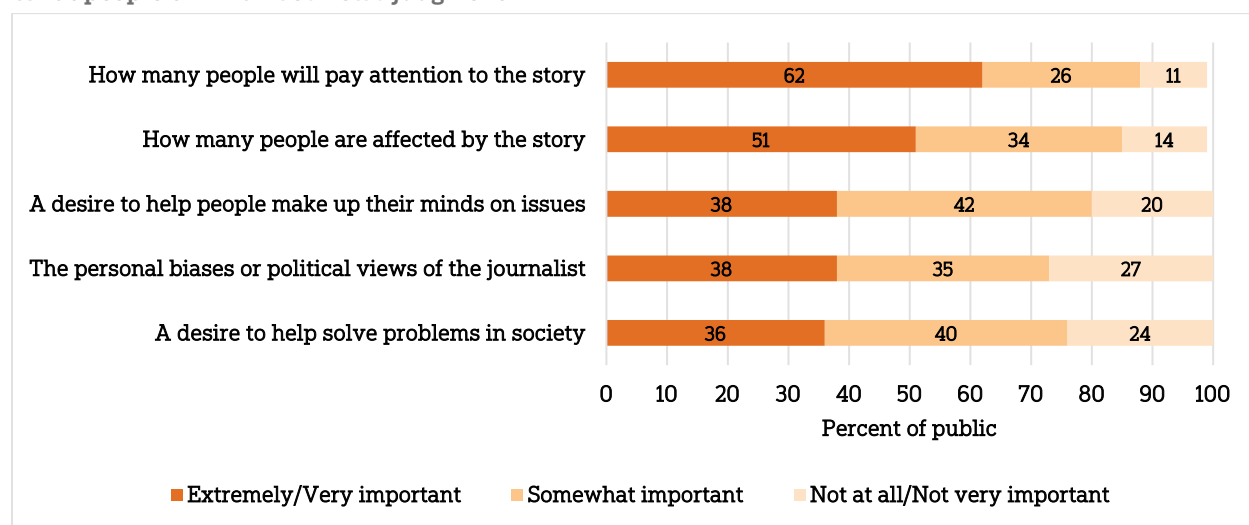
Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

THE PUBLIC IS SOMEWHAT POSITIVE ABOUT WHAT DRIVES JOURNALISTS TO COVER A STORY.

Although the public feels somewhat lukewarm toward journalists and also sees problems of misinformation, they are not entirely cynical about journalists' motivations. When it comes to what's important when journalists decide which stories to cover, majorities say that journalists do care about how many people will pay attention to the story (62 percent) but also about how many people will be affected by it (51 percent).

Fewer, 38 percent, say the personal biases or views of the journalists play a key role. Similar proportions think journalists are driven by a desire to help people form their views on issues or solve society's problems.

What people think drives news judgment



Question: "When journalists are deciding which stories to cover, how important do you think each of the following is in their decision-making?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

HOW DOES PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH NEWS AFFECT A PERSON'S VIEWS?

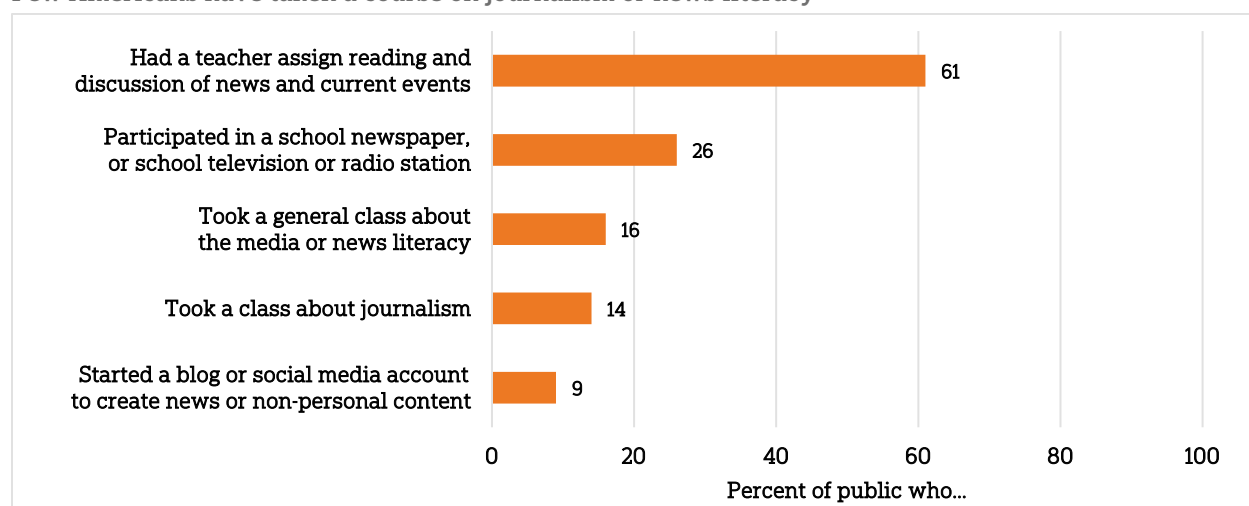
The extent of personal experience a person has with journalism – including being covered or interviewed in the news, or having some education in journalism themselves – impacts how well a person understands news processes and concepts.

We explored several ways adults may have had personal experiences with journalism. We then examined how those experiences affected their view of journalism.

EDUCATION AND HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE FACTOR INTO TRUST AND UNDERSTANDING.

One important category is news experience in an educational setting – taking a class or working in student-run media. About a quarter of people say they have worked on a school publication of some sort. Just 16 percent report experience with taking a class on the topic of media or news literacy.

Few Americans have taken a course on journalism or news literacy



Question: "People have different ways of learning about how the media works. Have you ever done any of the following, or not?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

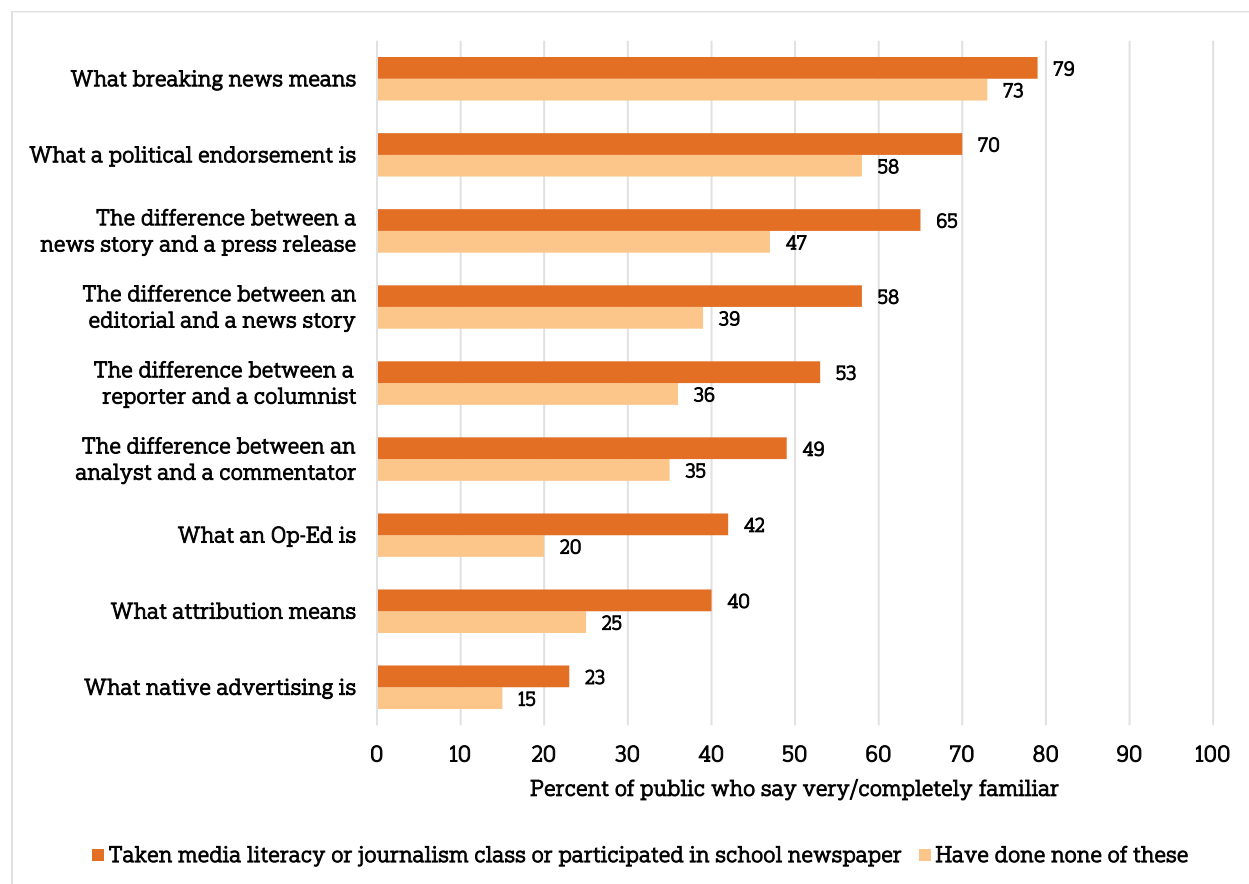
A third of the public has none of these experiences learning about the news media in school – not even discussing current events in the news or taking a course in news literacy. And less than 1 in 10, or 6 percent, has done all of them.

Did taking a news literacy course or working on a school publication materially change people's understanding of some key news concepts? Did it correlate to people trusting the press?

Media literacy classes appear to have some impact in educating the public about the news. People who have taken a class about media or news literacy are more familiar with common journalistic terms than those who have not. They are also more likely to correctly understand how journalists use anonymous sources (65 percent vs. 57 percent).

It may not be surprising that those who have more educational experience related to news are more familiar with terms and concepts about journalism. However, it is notable that those with such experience – who have taken a news literacy or journalism class, or participated in a school newspaper, radio, or TV station – are more familiar with every term we asked about, except “breaking news,” with which both groups hold similar levels of familiarity.

Do journalism, news literacy courses, and school media experience correlate to more knowledge of news?



Question: “Next is a list of different terms or concepts that sometimes appear in journalism and media but may or may not be familiar to most people. How familiar are you with each term or concept?”

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Those who were involved with a course or school media also have an easier time differentiating between opinion and news. Sixty-one percent say it is easy to distinguish opinion from news generally, compared to 52 percent of others. Those with such media experience also report having an easier time discerning between opinion and news on their own preferred sources (79 percent vs. 72 percent, respectively). And they say it is easier to distinguish opinion and news on PBS, public radio, and local TV news.

However, experience with a media literacy course or school media does not improve knowledge of whether journalists pay for sources. Those who have taken a news literacy class and those who have not are equally likely to think journalists pay sources for their information.

Further, educational experience with news does not seem to affect Americans' views about the media's direction. Majorities of those who have taken a news literacy or journalism class, or participated in a school newspaper, say the news media is headed in the wrong direction. Each group also holds similar levels of trust in the media in general, and over the last year.

However, those who have educational experience with the media do hold slightly more positive views of news organizations in general than others (40 percent positive vs. 34 percent positive). They also express more positive views of their own preferred news sources, national newspapers, NPR, PBS, and individual journalists they follow.

HOW INTERACTIONS WITH JOURNALISTS OR INVOLVEMENT IN NEWS COVERAGE AFFECTS UNDERSTANDING AND TRUST IN NEWS

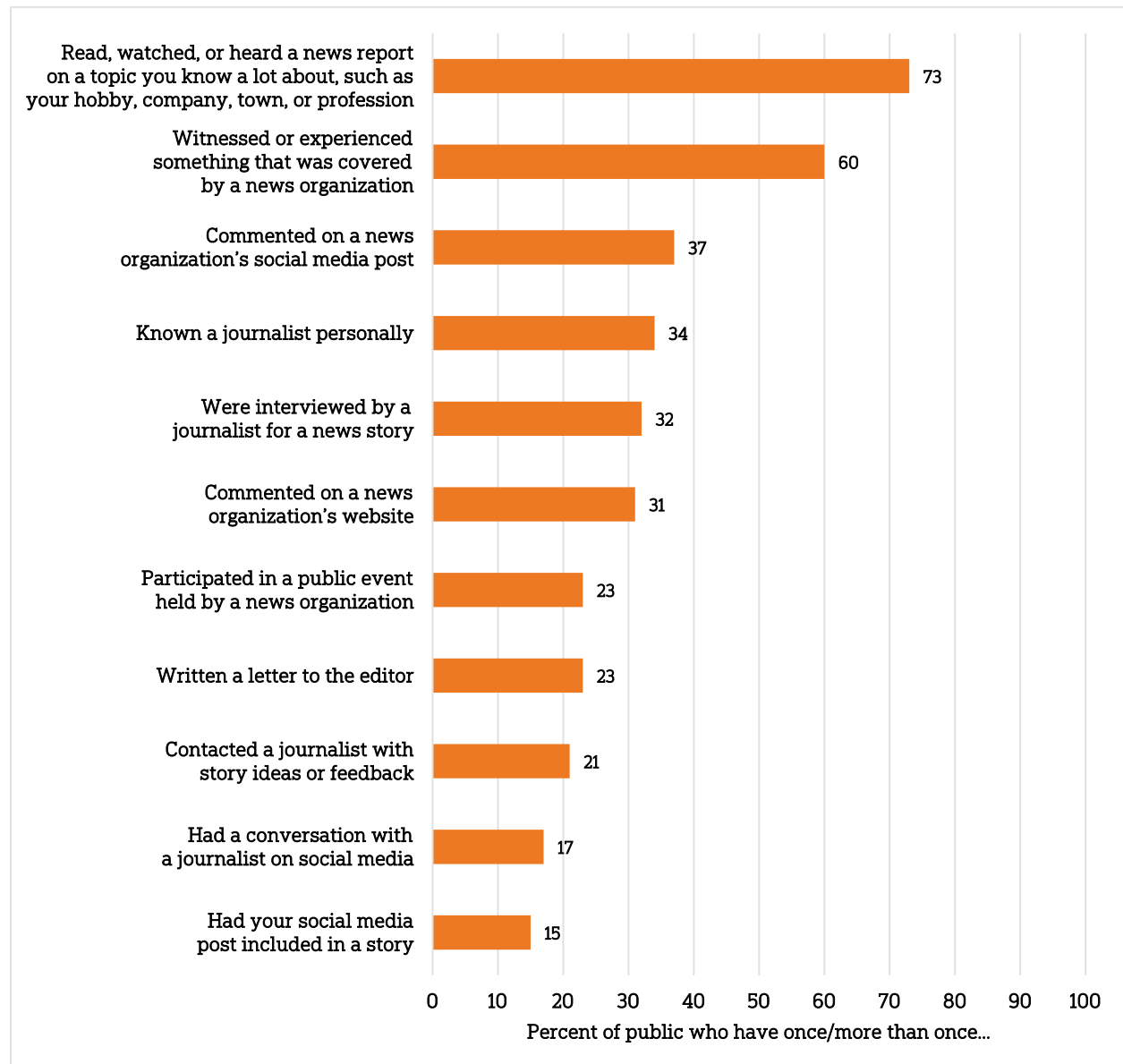
Most people's direct experience with news media comes not as students but as consumers, interacting in some way with a news organization or being involved or having firsthand knowledge of a story.

We asked the public whether they have had a number of experiences with the news media either once, more than once, or never. The public reports that their most common experience is encountering journalism about something they know a lot about – their town, hobby, company, or such. Nearly three-quarters of people (73 percent) report interacting with the media this way either once or more than once.

And 6 in 10 have been witness to a news event for which they later saw coverage.

Far fewer, 32 percent, say they have ever personally been interviewed by a journalist, and a third (34 percent) have known a journalist.

Few people report ever having personal interactions with journalists



Question: "Next, people may interact with the media in many ways, or they may not. In general, how often have you done or experienced each of the following?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

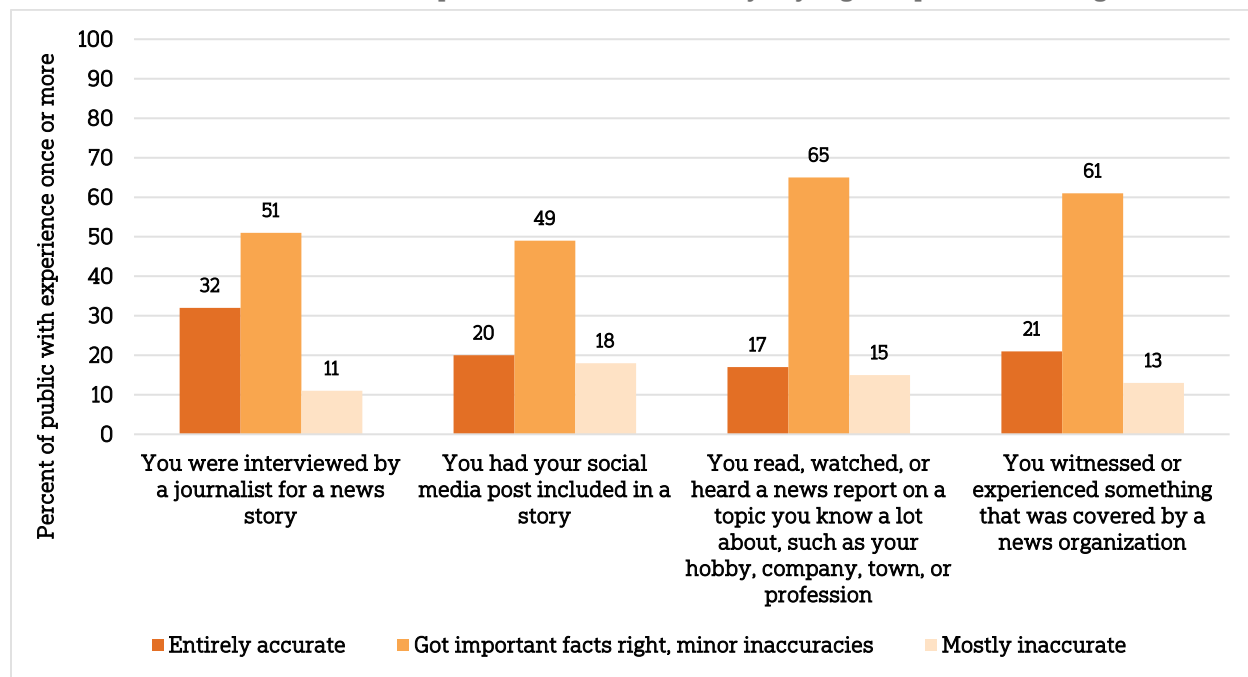
And how do people feel about the times when they knew a lot or were part of a story? In general, they feel pretty good. The public reports that their direct experience with the news was mostly unbiased and fair, and that news stories got the important facts right at minimum, with minor inaccuracies.

Among those interviewed by a journalist for a news story, nearly 1 in 3 say the reporting was entirely accurate. About half (51 percent) say most facts were correct though there were minor inaccuracies. About 8 in 10 say the reporting was unbiased and fair.

Those who have had a social media post included in a story do not feel as good as those interviewed directly. Two in 10 say the reporting containing their social media post was entirely accurate, and nearly half (49 percent) say the facts were correct with minor inaccuracies. But 18 percent say it was mostly inaccurate/got important facts wrong, and 38 percent indicate it was biased and unfair.

People who've seen content on a topic they feel they know a lot about, such as their company or profession, as well as people who witnessed or experienced a news event, both feel pretty good about the outcome. Over 6 in 10 say there were minor inaccuracies, but important facts were correct, and over 7 in 10 say the reporting was unbiased and fair.

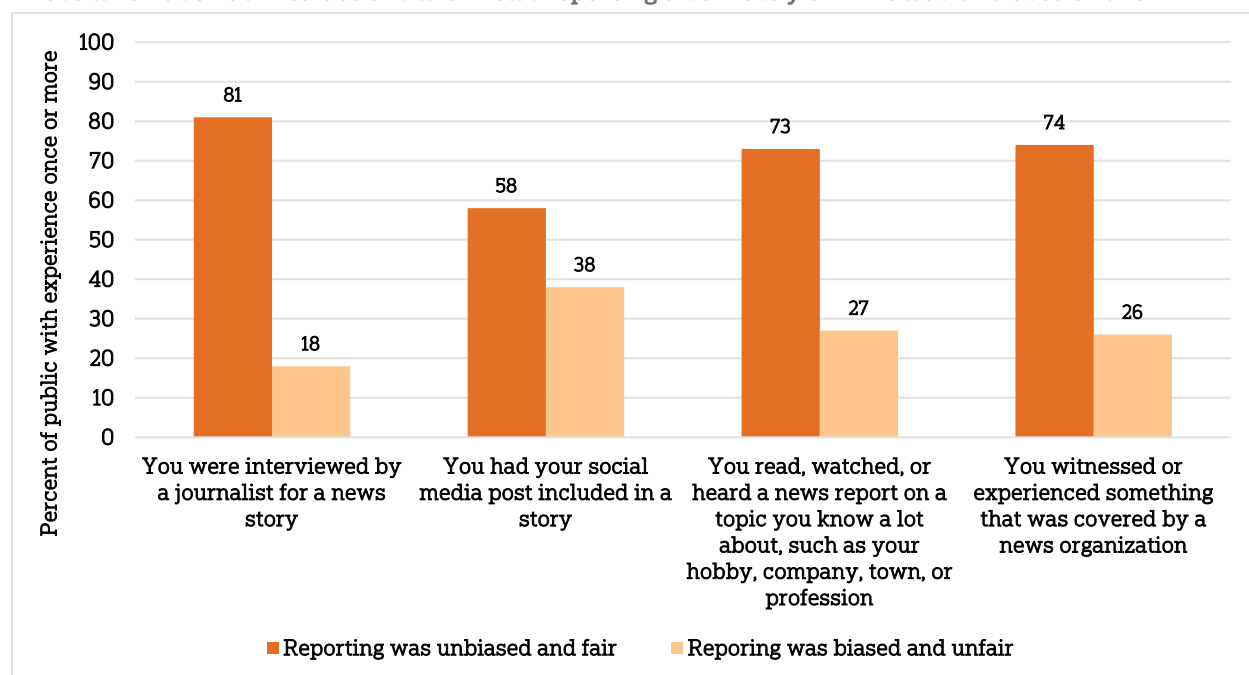
Most Americans who have direct experience with a news story say it got important facts right



Question: "Which of the following comes closest to what you observed about the reporting when/the most recent time when....?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Those who have had interactions with news reporting also mostly think it was unbiased and fair



Question: "Which of the following comes closest to what you observed about the reporting when/the most recent time when...?"

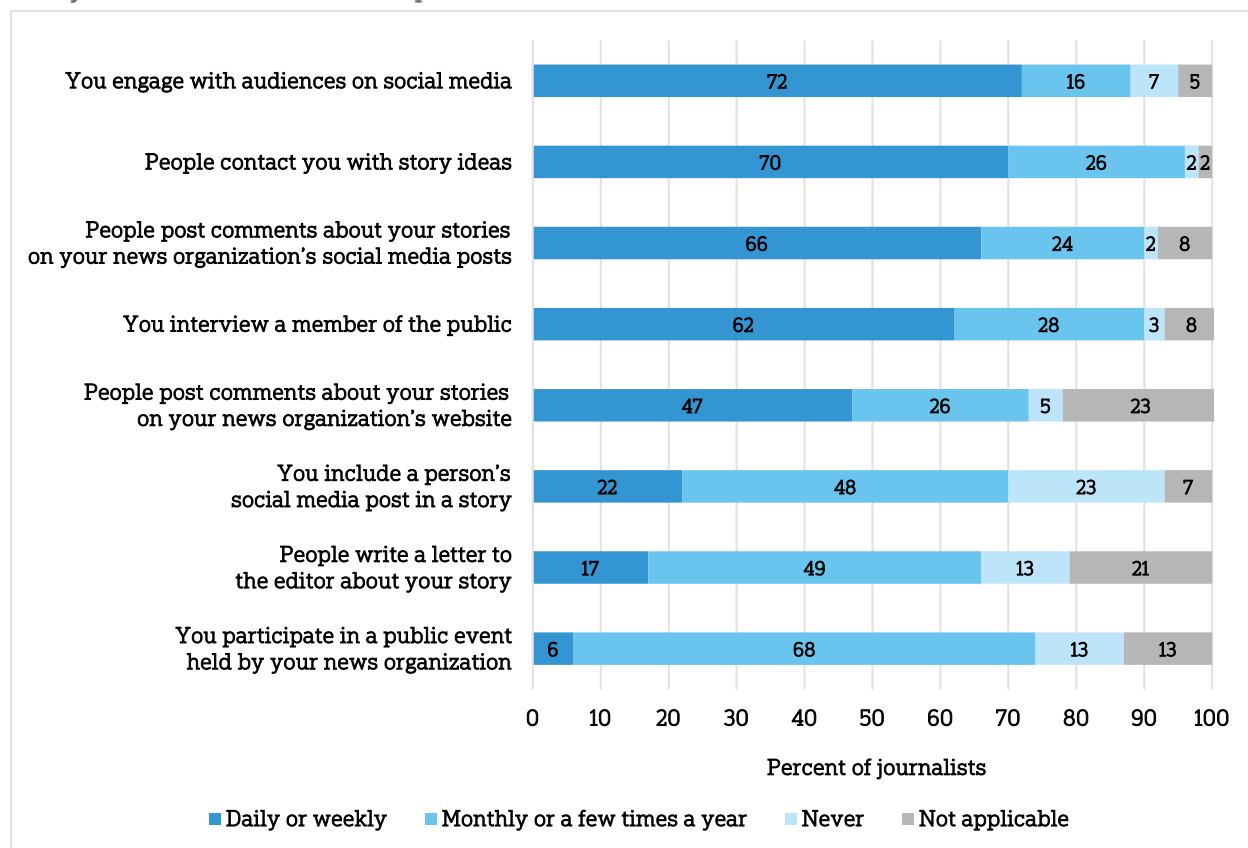
Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

JOURNALISTS INTERACT WITH THE PUBLIC MORE FREQUENTLY ON SOCIAL MEDIA THAN THROUGH INTERVIEWS.

Overall, people seem most satisfied with news stories in which they were interviewed directly by a journalist, but our study also suggests that that is happening somewhat less often than some other kinds of encounters journalists have with the public.

The internet has made journalism more interactive, dramatically increasing the ways and frequency with which people in newsrooms hear from audiences. Social media contact is now the broadest way that journalists interact with the public. Fully 72 percent of journalists surveyed say they engage with audiences on social media daily or weekly. Seven in 10 hear from audiences with story ideas – though that could come in various forms. Two-thirds have heard from audiences about stories they have worked on via social media, far outstripping the comments that come on news organizations' websites (47 percent). At the same time, 62 percent of journalists say they do interviews with a member of the public this frequently.

How journalists interact with the public



Question: "As a news organization employee, you may interact with people in many ways. In general, how often do you experience each of the following?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

LEVELS OF TRUST AND HOW AMERICANS FEEL ABOUT THE FAIRNESS AND ACCURACY OF THE PRESS

TRUST IN THE MEDIA OVERALL HAS DECLINED IN THE LAST YEAR, BUT PEOPLE'S TRUST IN THEIR FAVORITE NEWS OUTLETS HAS GROWN.

If we look at trust in the most general way, just under half (44 percent of adults) say their trust in the news has decreased in the last year. Fully 19 percent say it has decreased a lot, and 25 percent say a little. Almost as many, 4 in 10, say their level of trust has neither increased nor decreased. Both of these numbers are more than double the proportion of adults (17 percent) who say their trust has increased in the last year.

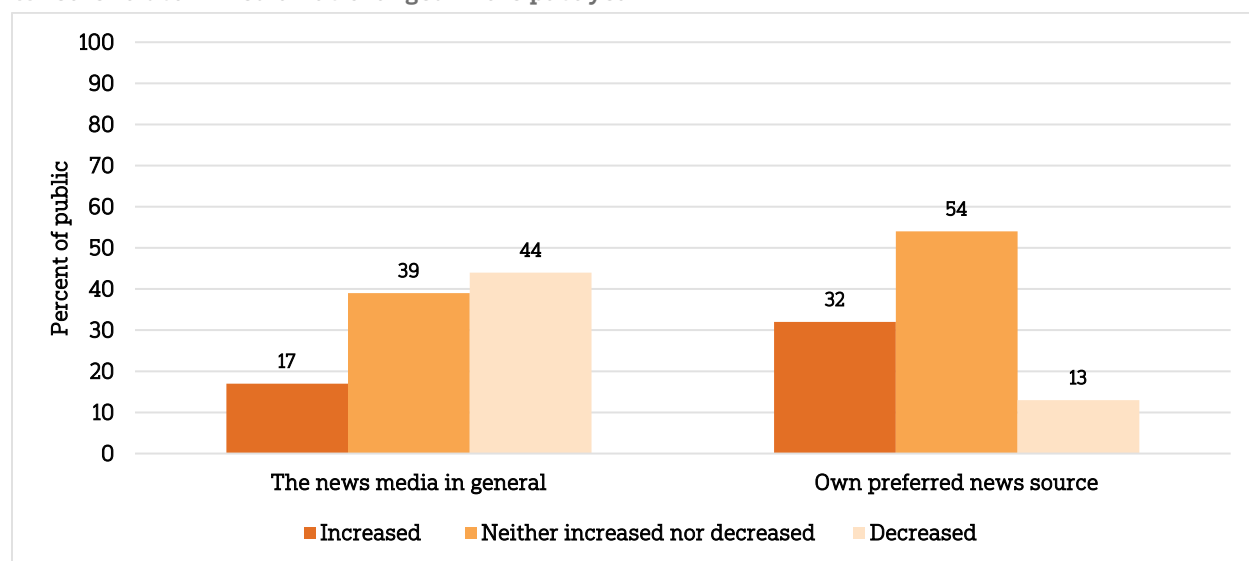
But these overall numbers can also be misleading in some ways. In a fragmented media landscape, the notion of a mass media that everyone consumes together – as in the era of the three nightly newscasts nationally or a singular newspaper in every city – no longer captures the reality of how news is consumed. The questions about media trust inevitably are asking people to describe an attitude toward publications they do not use.

To avoid that problem, the survey asked people to name a publication or outlet they rely on heavily. When we look at the data this way, we get a quite different picture. Indeed, in terms of Americans' level of trust in their preferred news source, more say it has increased (32 percent) rather than decreased (13 percent) in the last year. For most adults (54 percent), their level of trust in their favorite news source has stayed the same.

In many ways, we think this view of trust is as valuable as anything else because it captures their attitude toward the media they are really using.

This nuanced picture suggests that while people are alarmed about the state of media, they are able to find publications and sources that they not only trust but that they think are improving.

Whether trust in media has changed in the past year



Question: "In the last year, has your level of trust in the news media in general..."

Question: "In the last year, has your level of trust in [OWN PREFERRED NEWS SOURCE]..."

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

How do journalists feel about the public and trust? The answer is mixed. On the one hand, they imagine that in the last year, the public's trust of the news media has decreased more than it actually has. On the other hand, journalists view themselves as far more trustworthy in general than does the public.

Overall, about 3 in 4 journalists imagine the public's level of trust of the news media has decreased in the last year, nearly twice the number the public actually reports. Just 12 percent of journalists think it has increased, and 11 percent think the public's level of trust has stayed the same.

As mentioned above, 44 percent of adults say that their level of trust in the news media has decreased in the last year, 17 percent say it has increased, and 39 percent report that it has stayed the same.

That sense of alarm among journalists – an overestimation of how much the public's level of trust has declined – is even more complex because journalists themselves have a higher opinion of their own work.

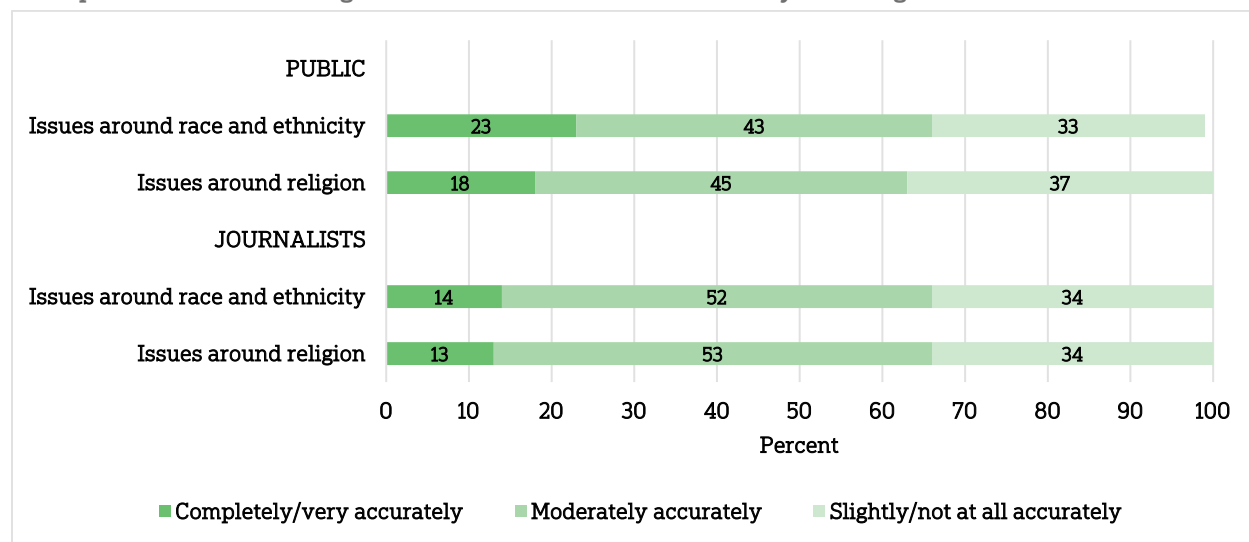
More than 7 in 10 journalists (72 percent) themselves think the news media are very (16 percent) or somewhat (56 percent) trustworthy, while 16 percent say it is somewhat or very untrustworthy. In reality, 44 of the public calls the news media very or somewhat trustworthy, 36 percent think it is untrustworthy, and 20 percent say it is neither.³

We also dove more deeply into the question of how accurate both the public and journalists think the media are by asking about coverage of different controversial issues, including those around ethnicity and race and religion.

The public actually gave the press slightly higher marks on those issues than the press gave itself, though the marks weren't particularly high from either group. Just nearly a quarter of the public says the press is very or completely accurate in its coverage of race and ethnicity, versus just 14 percent of journalists.

The same, though less starkly so, is true when it comes to religion – 18 percent of public respondents give the press high marks for accuracy versus 13 percent of journalists.

Perceptions of news coverage of issues around race and ethnicity and religion



Question: "Thinking about news coverage in general, how accurately do you think news organizations portray each of the following topics?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

We also evaluated these opinions about accuracy by relevant demographic groups. Answers varied very little. Both white Americans and people of color hold similar views on the accuracy (or lack thereof) of race and ethnicity in media coverage. Twenty-eight percent of blacks, 25 percent of Hispanics, and 22 percent of whites say news coverage on this topic is completely or very accurate, and about a third across groups say it is slightly or not at all accurate.

³ A recent [survey](#) by The Poynter Institute for Media Studies asked whether there was trust and confidence in the mass media. Using different question wording than the current study, the research finds that 49 percent of the public say they have a great deal or fair amount of trust and confidence, and 52 percent report not very much or none at all. In the report, it is indicated that the results are more positive toward the press than other recent surveys (pg. 1). The questions asked in this current study use different wording, probe how trust has changed in the last year, and ask about levels of trust in one's most preferred source. The results here show a nuanced picture: fewer express trust in the news media, but fewer also express distrust. In addition, trust was more likely to stay the same or increase in the last year, and was more likely to increase when respondents were asked about their own preferred news source.

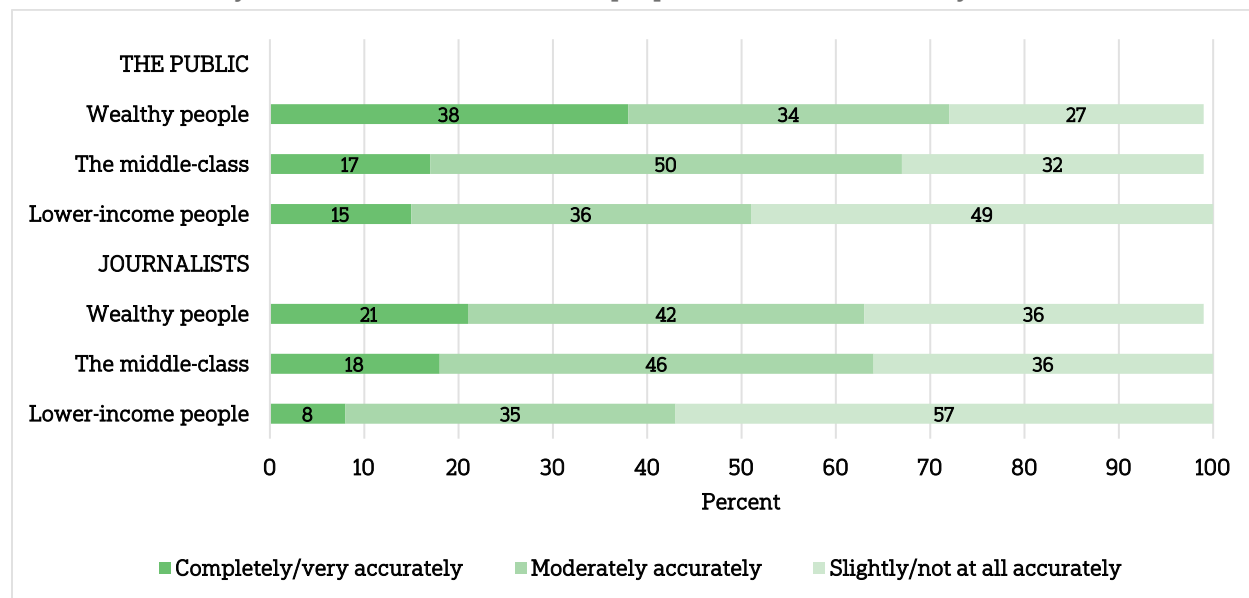
Religious Americans and non-religious Americans also look similar on their views toward the media's coverage of issues around religion. Eighteen percent of those with a religious affiliation and 17 percent of those with no religion consider the media's coverage accurate on this topic, and over a third of each group (37 percent with religious affiliation, 35 percent with no affiliation) think it is slightly or not at all accurate.⁴

But while the survey shows that there are no differences between whites and non-whites on issues of race and ethnicity, or between religious groups⁵ and non-religious Americans on issues around religion, partisan differences do emerge. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say issues of race and ethnicity (42 percent vs. 24 percent) and religion (47 percent vs. 28 percent) are portrayed inaccurately.

We also asked both journalists and the public about coverage of different groups to get a more specific read on accuracy. In almost every case, once again, the press is harder on itself than the public is.

For instance, 38 percent of the public gives the press high marks for accuracy in covering the wealthy versus only 21 percent of journalists. Americans are also almost twice as likely as journalists to say the press accurately covers lower-income people, though notably those percentages are particularly small (15 percent vs. 8 percent). Almost half of the public (49 percent), and even more journalists (57 percent), think the press does not cover the poor accurately.

Few Americans or journalists think lower-income people are covered accurately



Question: "Thinking about news coverage in general, how accurately do you think news organizations portray each of the following?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

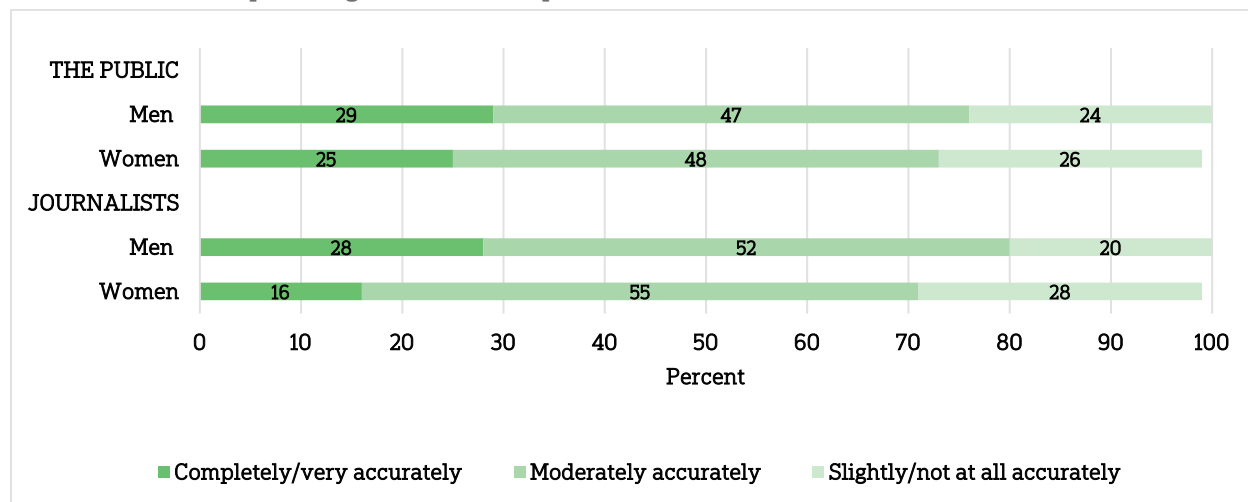
Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

⁴ Looking within the group with religious affiliations – Protestants, Catholics, and other Christians – there were only slight differences in perceptions of accuracy. While similar proportions of other Christians (15 percent), Protestants (17 percent), and Catholics (23 percent) view news coverage around religious issues to be accurate, Catholics (30 percent) are somewhat less likely than Protestants (39 percent) and other Christians (43 percent) to call such coverage slightly or not at all accurate.

⁵ Note that non-Christians are also included in the definition of religiously affiliated, though there were not enough respondents for a separate subgroup analysis.

One of the few areas where the press and the public align: They are equally likely to say men are accurately covered (about 3 in 10 each gives high marks). By comparison, a quarter of the public (25 percent) and 16 percent of journalists say the media accurately portray women.

Journalists and the public agree on how the press covers men



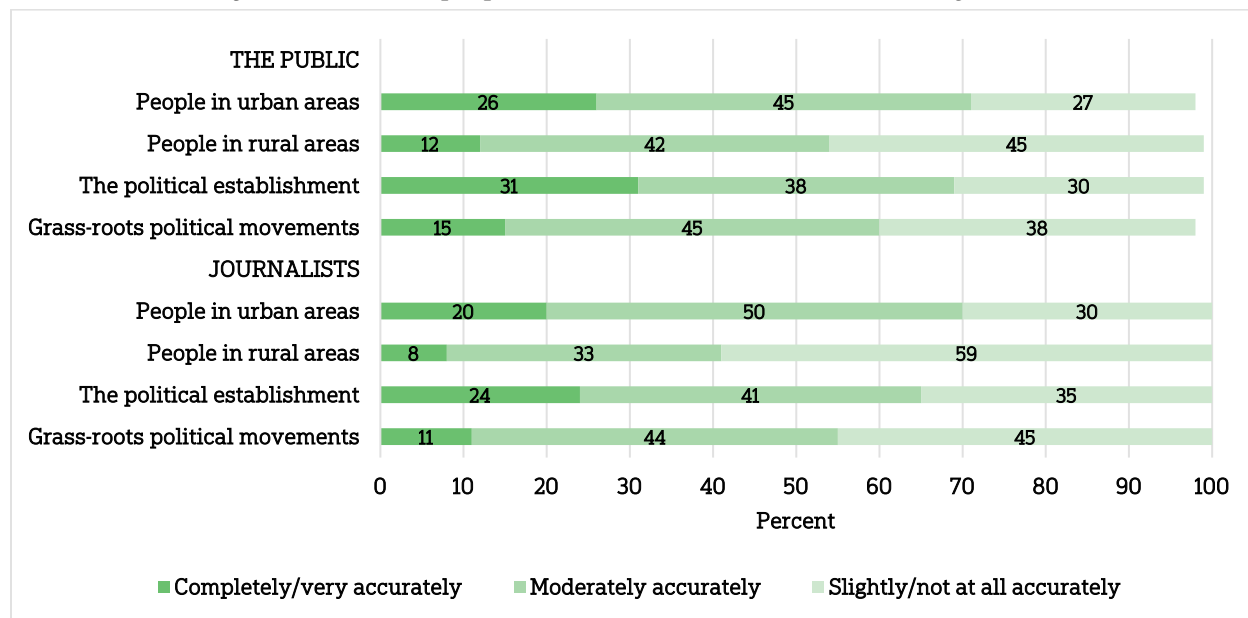
Question: "Thinking about news coverage in general, how accurately do you think news organizations portray each of the following?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

What group do both journalists and the public think the press is least likely to cover accurately? People in rural America. Only 12 percent of the public and 8 percent of journalists think they accurately cover that population group.

Few Americans or journalists think people in rural areas are covered accurately



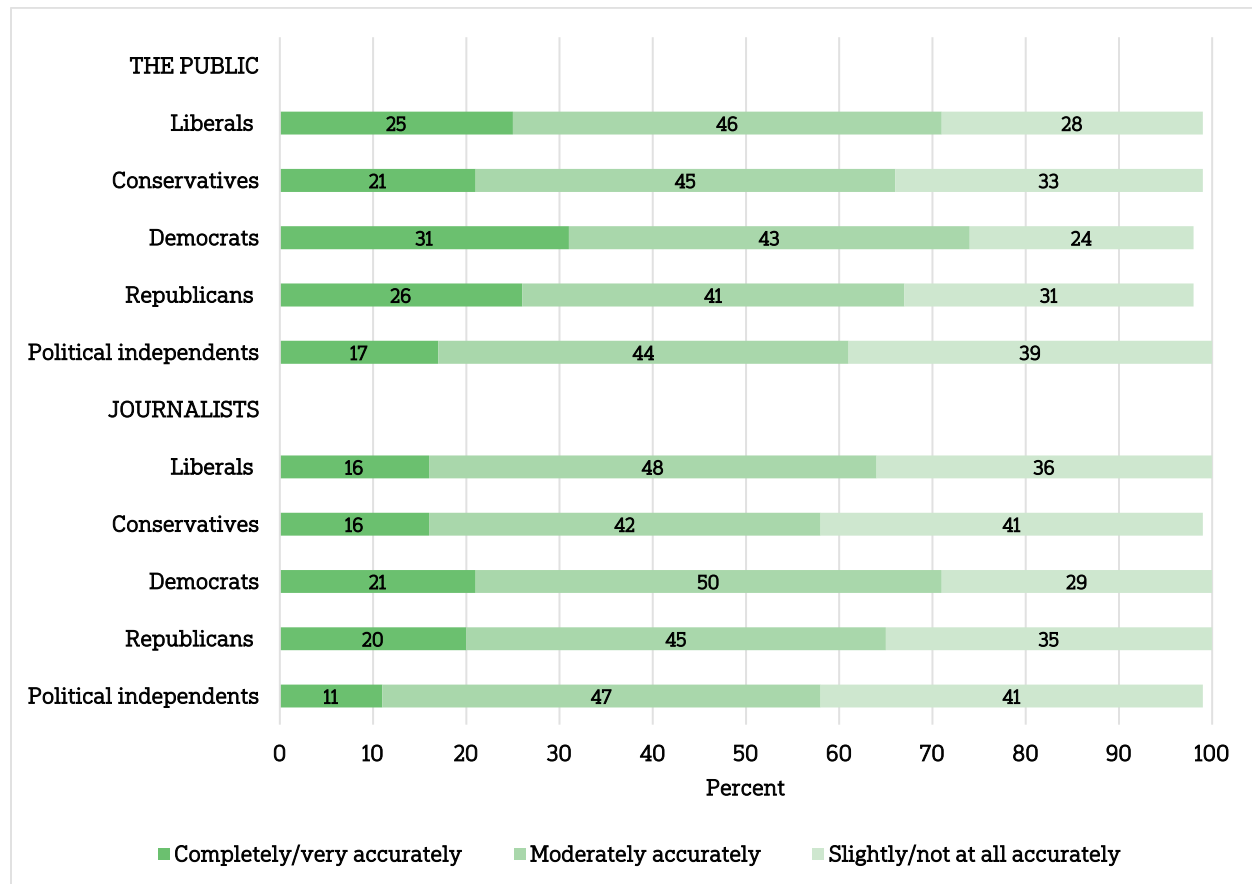
Question: "Thinking about news coverage in general, how accurately do you think news organizations portray each of the following?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

When it comes to political groups, journalists' and the public's views on accuracy are broadly similar. In general, journalists view the coverage of political groups as less accurate than the public. At the same time, each group offers the lowest ratings for how accurately political independents are covered.

Journalists and the public view coverage of political groups in a similar light



Question: "Thinking about news coverage in general, how accurately do you think news organizations portray each of the following?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

HOW REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS VIEW PRESS ACCURACY

As we explored the notion of press accuracy and different groups of people, we also were able to see how different political groups view the press.

Importantly, there are some partisan differences on perceptions of accuracy that also may offer some sense of how the press can begin to try to bridge this critical communication gap.

In general, Republicans are more negative about the accuracy of news organizations' coverage of groups than are Democrats and independents. For example, Republicans are much more likely than others to think the press inaccurately covers men (34 percent vs. 16 percent of Democrats and 25 percent of independents). Republicans (29 percent) are also somewhat more likely than Democrats (22 percent) to say news coverage of women is slightly or not at all accurate. Further, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say the coverage of the wealthy is inaccurate.

Republicans are also much more likely to say the press does not accurately cover Republicans and conservatives. Majorities of Republicans say conservatives (53 percent) and their own party (51 percent) are portrayed inaccurately. Republicans are also the most likely to say that Democrats are not accurately portrayed – over a third (35 percent) say the media covers this group inaccurately – more than twice the proportion of Democrats who say so (15 percent). These opinions among Republicans warrant further assessment to reconnect with this audience.

Interestingly, partisanship does not affect opinions about coverage of some other groups. For instance, there are no partisan differences when it comes to perceptions of the poor. Nearly half of both Republicans (48 percent) and Democrats (47 percent) consider coverage of lower-income people slightly or not at all accurate. And while there are differences in how partisans' perceive coverage of rural Americans and grassroots political movements, those gaps are statistically driven by demographics and other variables more than partisanship.

For some of these, support of President Trump is a dividing line. Americans who approve of Trump are more than twice as likely as those who disapprove to say the media's portrayal of Republicans is inaccurate. Fully 47 percent of Trump supporters think the GOP is inaccurately portrayed, while the number is 22 percent among those who don't support Trump.

WHERE DO AMERICANS THINK THE NEWS INDUSTRY IS GOING?

What do Americans think about the direction of the news industry? A majority, 56 percent, say it is headed in the wrong direction; 42 percent say the right direction.

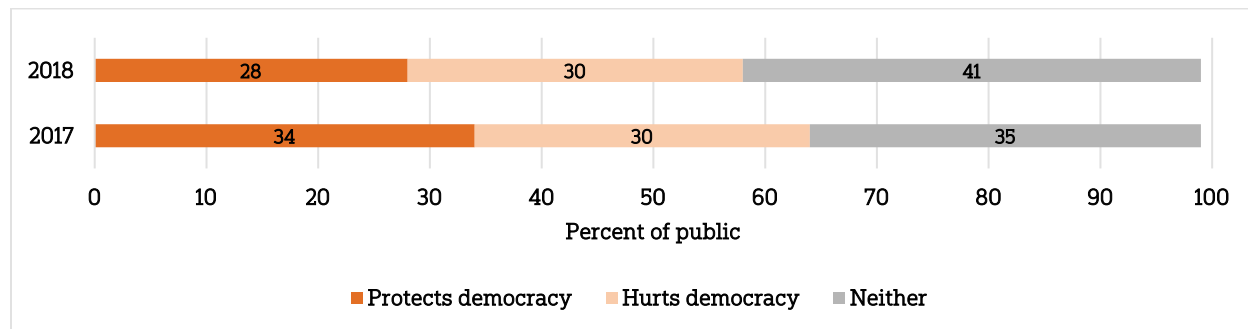
Views about the direction of the media correspond with trust. While 73 percent of those who trust the news media generally say the media is headed in the right direction, 92 percent of those who say it is untrustworthy think the media is headed in the wrong direction.

Journalists also view the media's direction more negatively than positively. Sixty-one percent say that the news industry is headed in the wrong direction.

THE PUBLIC IS DIVIDED ON WHETHER THE MEDIA PROTECTS OR HURTS DEMOCRACY.

Do Americans think the news media protects or hurts democracy? While a plurality (41 percent) say neither statement applies, adults are divided over whether the media protects (28 percent) or hurts (30 percent) democracy. In a [March 2017 survey](#) conducted by the Media Insight Project, 34 percent of Americans said the news media protects democracy, 30 percent said it hurts democracy, and 35 percent said neither statement applies. The slight shift in opinion since last year is associated with a 6 percentage point drop in the proportion saying the media protects democracy, and a 6 percentage point increase in the proportion saying it neither protects nor hurts.

More people in 2018 think the news media neither protects nor hurts democracy than sought so a year ago

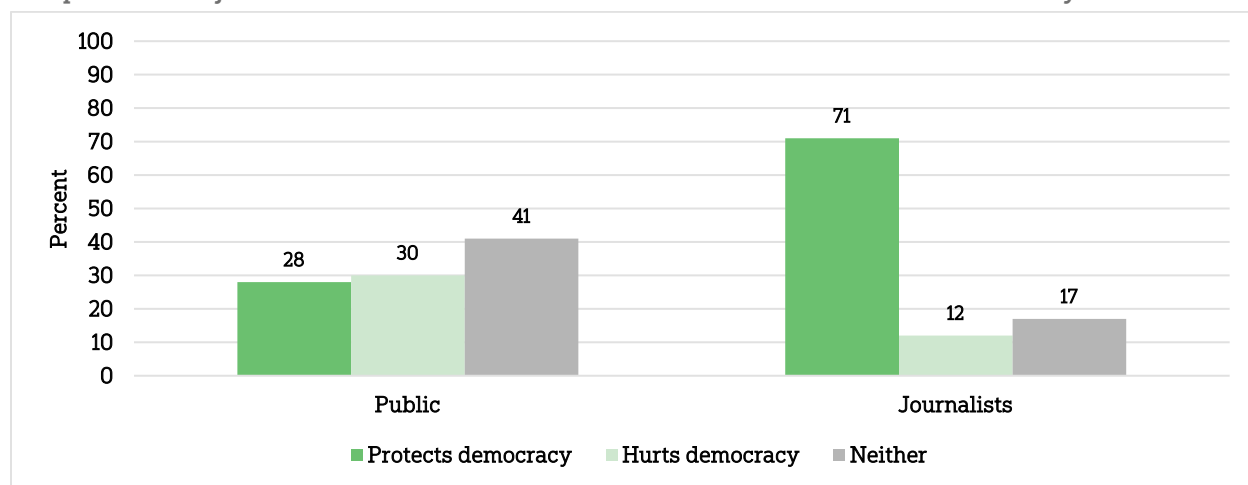


Question: "Here is a pair of opposite phrases. Which phrase do you feel better describes the news media in general. Would you say the news media in general..."

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

One of the largest differences in opinion between the public and journalists relates to the question of the media's role in American democracy. Here, journalists are much more positive than the public. Fully 7 in 10 journalists think the news media protects democracy, while only 1 in 10 think it hurts democracy and nearly 2 in 10 say it does neither.

The public's and journalists' views on the role of the news media in American democracy



Question: "Here is a pair of opposite phrases. Which phrase do you feel better describes the news media in general. Would you say the news media in general..."

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

A majority of the public (53 percent) thinks the news media is too ideological – either too liberal (37 percent) or too conservative (16 percent). Forty-six percent believe it is just about right. These findings are similar to results from a [Media Insight Project survey](#) conducted in March 2017. In that poll, 36 percent thought the news media was too liberal, 13 percent said too conservative, and 49 percent thought it was just about right.

Ideologically, a majority of journalists (54 percent) think the news media is just about right, whereas fewer think it is too ideological, either too liberal (30 percent) or too conservative (16 percent).

HOW AMERICANS DESCRIBE THEIR NEWS CONSUMPTION BEHAVIORS

AMERICANS SAY THEY FREQUENTLY SCAN HEADLINES AND ALSO READ STORIES IN-DEPTH, BUT PAY ATTENTION TO OPINION CONTENT LESS OFTEN.

Most Americans describe themselves as active news consumers. Sixty-three percent report that they seek out news and information. Far fewer, 37 percent, say they mostly bump into news as they do other things or hear about it from others.

Americans also report consuming news and information frequently. By a large majority, nearly two-thirds of adults now say they look at news at least several times a day. We are now a nation of serial news consumers.

Of that, 59 percent now say they look at news several times a day, and another 6 percent say they look several times an hour.

Nine in 10 Americans say it is at least moderately important to them to keep up with the news, including nearly half who say it is very or extremely important.

Compared to past research from the Media Insight Project in 2016 and 2017, these measures of news and information consumption have remained steady in 2018.

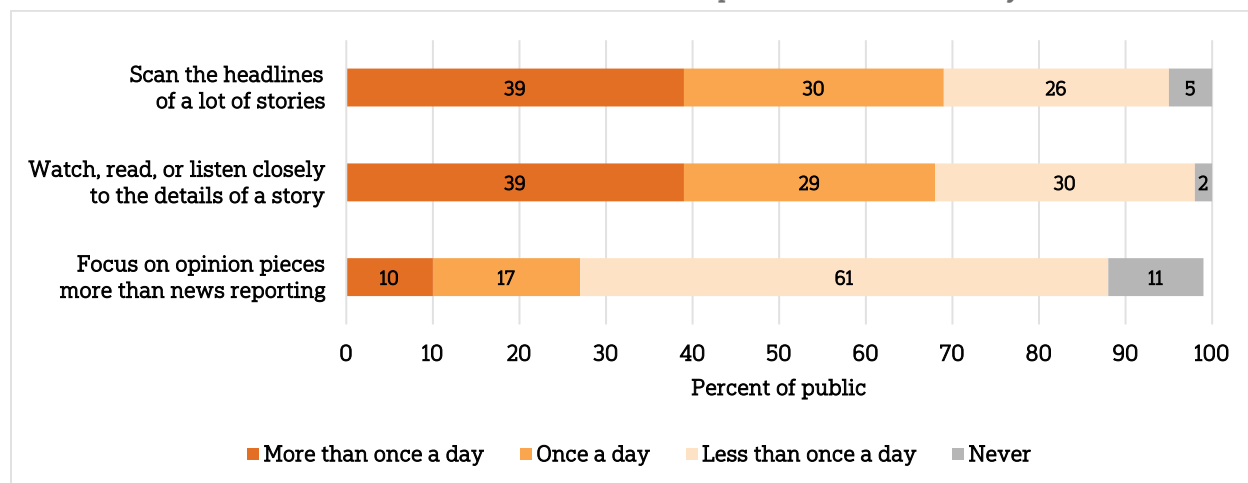
And how deep is our news consumption, if it is now so frequent? The data suggests that the answer to that is nuanced. People both scan and read deeply. A simplistic notion of distracted Americans just glancing at headlines with little effort at going deep does not accurately describe what people believe they are doing.

When it comes to specific behaviors, 4 in 10 Americans say they scan headlines at least several times a day, and another 3 in 10 say they read the headlines once a day. But Americans report watching, reading, or listening closely to the details of a story at the same rate.

Interestingly, though opinion content has become far more prevalent in a world when anyone can publish, far fewer adults say they regularly seek out commentary. More than 7 in 10 say they do this less than once a day or never.

Even if people – who admittedly elsewhere say they are somewhat confused by the difference between news and commentary – are mistaken in their behavior, these results are a fairly clear signal, reinforced in other answers, that they want news more than opinion. That should be a good sign for news organizations that want to invest in their reporting resources because it will distinguish them from the sea of opinion today.

Four in 10 Americans scan headlines and read stories in-depth more than once a day



Question: "Everyone has a different way of consuming news. How often do you do each of the following?"

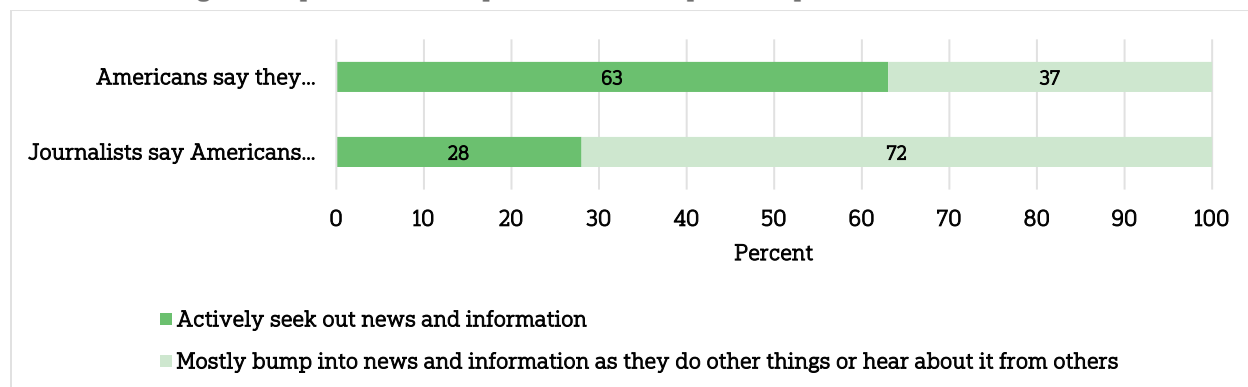
Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

The results are also interesting because they reveal that Americans describe their news consumption habits quite differently from the ways journalists perceive or expect the public to interact with news. Journalists view the public as more passive news consumers who focus on opinion and read less in-depth.

For instance, 6 in 10 Americans (63 percent) describe themselves as active seekers of news. Journalists predict the number is less than half that (28 percent).

Inversely, just 37 percent of Americans say they mostly bump into news, but journalists predict that the number of bumpers is almost double that (72 percent).

Journalists imagine the public as more passive than the public reports itself to be



Question: "Choose the statement that best describes you, even if it is not exactly right. In general..."

Question: "Choose the statement that you think best describes news consumers in the United States, even if neither is exactly right. In general..."

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

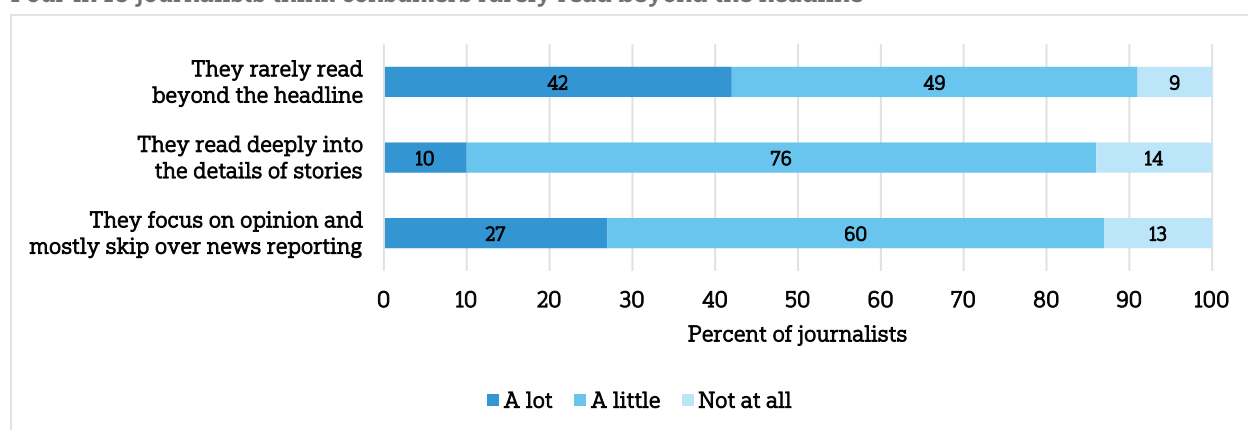
The same disconnect or skepticism about consumers exists among journalists when it comes to how deeply they imagine their audiences read.

While Americans report actively scanning headlines and reading deeply into stories, journalists do not think this is the case. Four in 10 journalists say that the phrase “they rarely read beyond the headline” describes news consumers a lot. Just 1 in 10 say they read deeply into the details of stories a lot.

Similarly, Americans report less focus on commentary than journalists perceive. Half of Americans say they infrequently or never focus on opinion pieces over news reporting, but nearly 3 in 10 journalists say the phrase “they focus on opinion and mostly skip over news reporting” describes the public a lot, and 6 in 10 say it describes them a little.

The data suggest that one challenge journalists have in rebuilding trust is that they don’t have all that charitable views of the public. They believe the public dislikes journalists more than they do, and also that they are more passive and shallow.

Four in 10 journalists think consumers rarely read beyond the headline



Question: “Here are some statements about news consumers in the United States. For each of the following statements, please indicate whether it describes news consumers a lot, a little, or not at all.”

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 1-April 12, 2018, with 1,127 journalists.

ARE NEWSPAPER SUBSCRIBERS MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE OR APPROVING OF THE NEWS MEDIA?

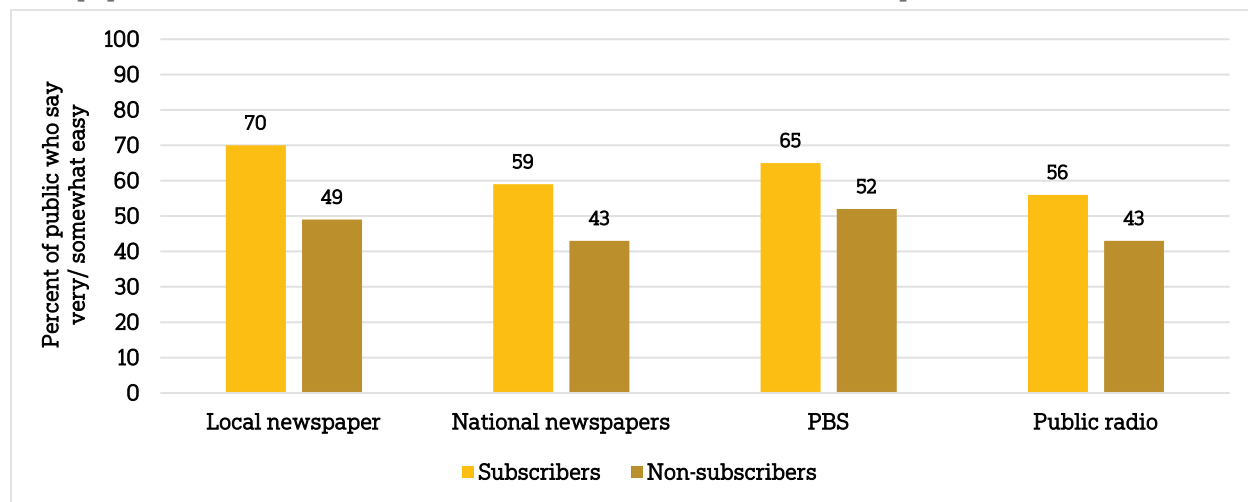
NEWSPAPER SUBSCRIBERS HOLD MORE POSITIVE VIEWS OF MANY SPECIFIC TYPES OF MEDIA — AND HAVE AN EASIER TIME DECIPHERING NEWS FROM OPINION — THAN DO NON-SUBSCRIBERS.

Overall, 29 percent of Americans subscribe to a print or digital version of a newspaper. These subscribers tend to have more positive views than non-subscribers on many components of the press, including journalists as a group (51 percent vs. 37 percent), news organizations in general (48 percent vs. 32 percent), public radio (56 percent vs. 37 percent), PBS (62 percent vs. 49 percent), and individual journalists they follow (55 percent vs. 38 percent).

As for newspapers specifically, subscribers are more likely than non-subscribers to assign positive ratings to both national papers (54 percent vs. 34 percent) and their local newspaper (61 percent vs. 41 percent).

Those who pay for a newspaper tend to think it is easier to differentiate opinion and fact in some types of media. In particular, majorities of subscribers say it is easy to distinguish the content in national or local papers, while fewer than half of non-subscribers say the same.

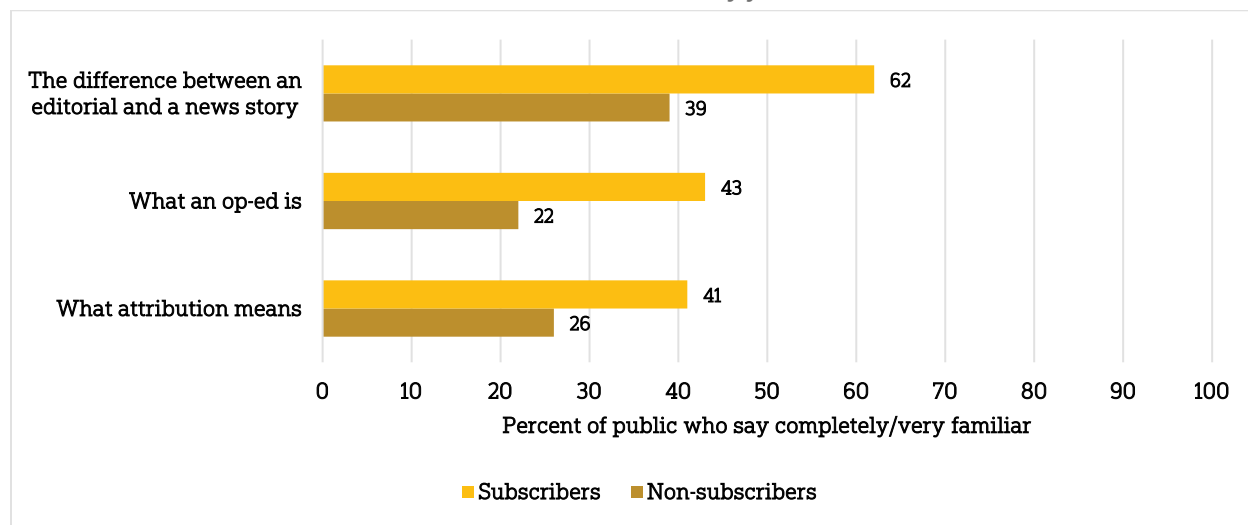
Newspaper subscribers often find it easier to tell the difference between opinion and news



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 each of the following?"
Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Subscribers also report a better understanding of a few journalistic terms than non-subscribers. Newspaper subscribers are more likely to say they are familiar with the term "editorial" versus a "news story," "op-ed," or "attribution." On its face, that difference may make sense – many of these terms have their roots in physical print papers. Still, even among subscribers, knowledge is relatively low. For example, fewer than half of subscribers are familiar with op-eds (43 percent) or attribution (41 percent).

Subscribers are more familiar than non-subscribers with key journalistic terms



Question: "Next is a list of different terms or concepts that sometimes appear in journalism and media but may or may not be familiar to most people. How familiar are you with each term or concept?"
Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

At the same time, subscribers look similar to non-subscribers in their understanding of what anonymous sources are. Similar proportions have the same understanding of how journalists' use anonymous sources – that journalists know a source's identity and verify their information, but do not use their name.

This is no guarantee that explaining themselves better will help news organizations win over more subscribers. But given that even current subscribers think the industry could do a far better job of explaining their practices – and the startling finding that journalists themselves think they do a poor job of explaining themselves while expecting that the public doesn't understand – the findings clearly indicate that journalists should do far more to increase news media literacy.

WHILE SUBSCRIBERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO THINK THE MEDIA PROTECTS DEMOCRACY, THEY AGREE THE INDUSTRY IS HEADED IN THE WRONG DIRECTION.

Subscribers and non-subscribers hold similar views on a number of general questions about the news media. In particular, they align when asked about general levels of trust. They also hold similar views of the ideological makeup of the media, with 45 percent of subscribers and 46 percent of non-subscribers saying it is just about right. Although subscribers are more likely to view the news media as protecting democracy (38 percent vs. 24 percent), they still see flaws in the industry, despite paying for a news product. Majorities of subscribers and non-subscribers alike say that the news media is headed in the wrong direction (54 percent vs. 58 percent).

HOW YOUNGER AND OLDER AMERICANS UNDERSTAND AND INTERACT WITH NEWS

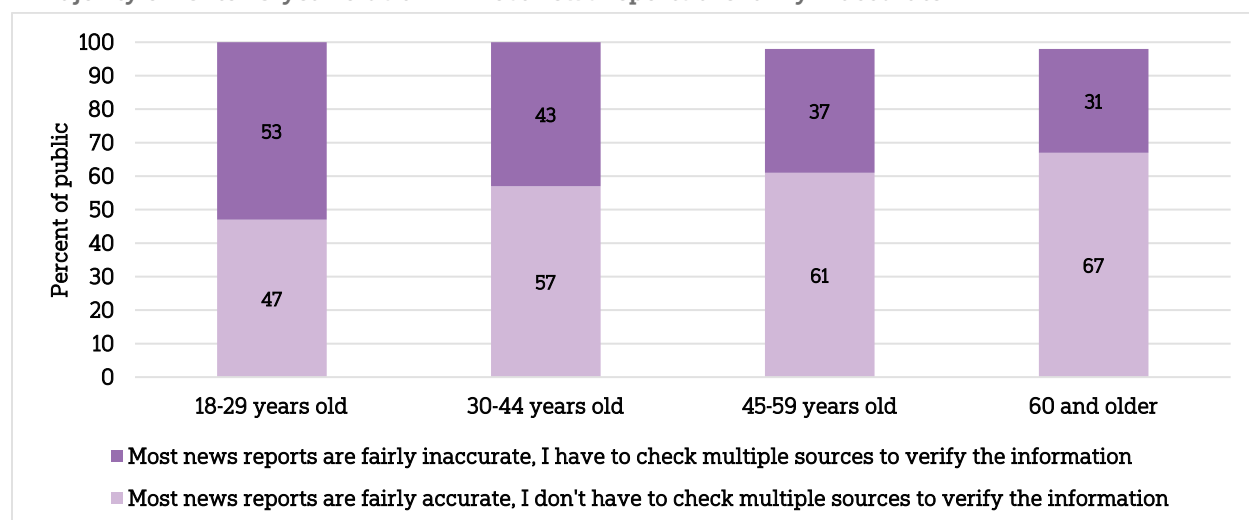
OLDER AMERICANS HAVE MORE POSITIVE VIEWS ABOUT THE ACCURACY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE MEDIA.

While the survey finds distinctions among attitudes and understanding of the media by factors like party and ideology, it also finds some significant and cautionary distinctions by age.

Consistent with previous [Media Insight Project research findings](#), and those of other research as well, the survey shows older Americans are more likely to seek out news, say following the news is highly important, and get news multiple times a day. But it also shows older adults tend to have more trust in the media than younger adults.

In fact, younger Americans are more likely than older adults to lack trust in both the media generally and also the news sources they rely on. While a majority of adults age 45 and older (52 percent) call the news media trustworthy, only about a third of those under age 45 (35 percent) agree. Adults age 45 and older even trust their preferred news sources more than do younger adults (80 percent vs. 66 percent).

Moreover, the youngest Americans are the only age cohort in our survey that says most news reports are fairly inaccurate. A majority of adults age 29 and younger say most news reports are fairly inaccurate (53 percent). A majority of those age 30-44 (57 percent), age 45-59 (61 percent), and age 60 or older (67 percent) say most news reports are fairly accurate.

A majority of 18- to 29-year-olds think most news reports are fairly inaccurate

Question: "Choose the statement that best describes how you view the news, even if it is not exactly right. In general..."
 Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

As a point of comparison, a majority of Republicans (55 percent) say news reports are fairly inaccurate, while over 7 in 10 Democrats (71 percent) say they are fairly accurate, though perhaps for different reasons.

One important and perennial question about such findings is whether they suggest that the media attitudes of these younger Americans will change as the younger generations surveyed become older? Researchers have been struggling with this question for nearly 30 years, since the Times Mirror Research Center for the People & the Press produced a study called [The Age of Indifference](#) in the early 1990s.

The answers were dramatically complicated by the explosion of new technology. Younger generations began to move online in such numbers it was hard to make generational comparisons that had been made before.

But the numbers here suggest that the differences between generations in trust in the media are becoming more entrenched – and even growing. The youngest generation of adults has grown up with a fragmented, more politicized media landscape, and it may be making a difference.

One clue is that the differences in trust in media across ages may also be increasing. For example, 63 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds say the media is headed in the wrong direction, compared with 49 percent of those 60 years old or older. Likewise, half of those age 18-29 report their level of trust in the media has decreased in the last year compared with about 4 in 10 adults age 60 and older.

When it comes to building or improving trust, majorities across all age groups say it is very or extremely important for journalists to offer more information about the sources or evidence cited in a story, and this is especially important to older adults. Seventy-seven percent of those age 60 and older and 73 percent of those age 45-59 say it is very important for journalists to offer more about sources or evidence, compared with 63 percent of those age 30-44 and 58 percent of those age 18-29.

OLDER ADULTS HAVE MORE POSITIVE VIEWS OF TV NEWS OUTLETS, WHILE YOUNGER ADULTS TEND TO HAVE MORE FAVORABLE ATTITUDES TOWARD SOCIAL MEDIA.

Another dynamic in sorting out the future of trust in media is that different generations now consume fairly different media. In particular, the signs are increasingly clear in this survey, as in others, that younger generations have less of a bond with and exposure to television news, either in cable or local or national broadcast news.

That can be seen in the fact that, although younger adults are more skeptical than older adults about the media in general, the public's ratings of specific types of media vary depending on age.

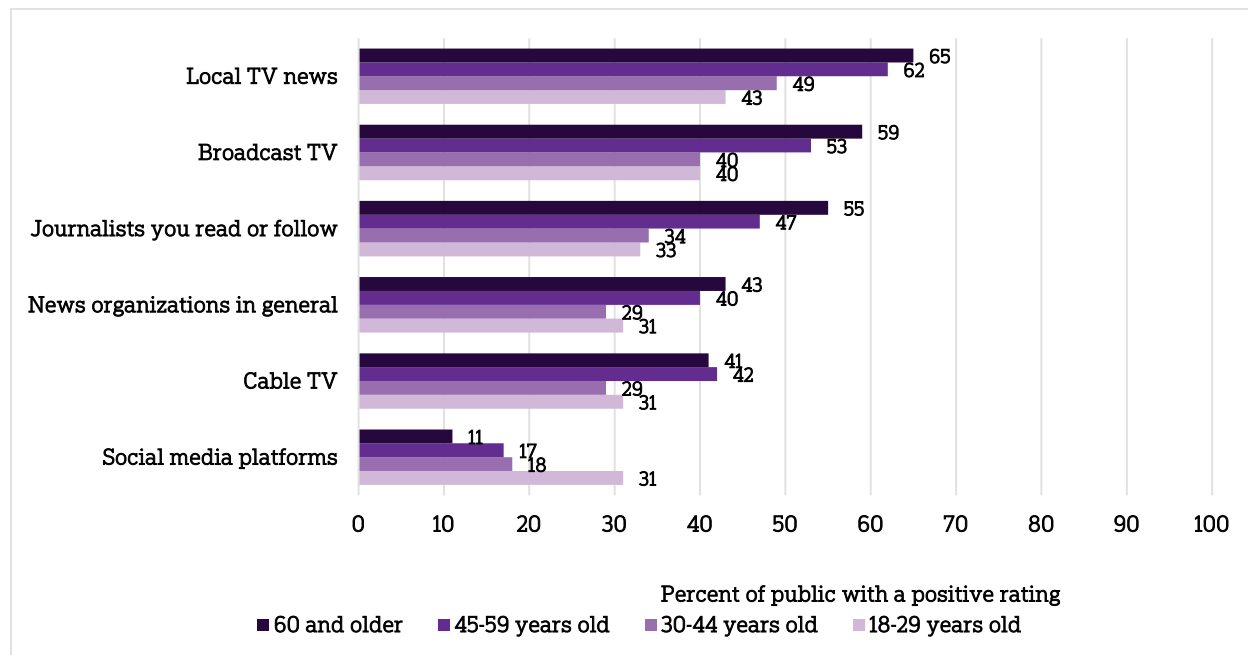
In particular, older adults are more likely than younger adults to provide positive ratings toward various types of television outlets. Younger adults have more favorable opinions of social media than older adults.

That is one of several signs we see that television news organizations increasingly face a challenge as younger Americans uncouple from cable, which is [occurring at a growing rate](#).

At the same time, there are no significant differences across age when it comes to views toward various types of newspaper and radio outlets.

Overall, older adults also tend to give more positive ratings to journalists they follow.

Older adults have more positive views toward TV news while younger adults have more favorable views of social media



Question: "For each of the following items related to the news media, please indicate whether you have a very positive, somewhat positive, neither positive nor negative, somewhat negative, or very negative view of that item."

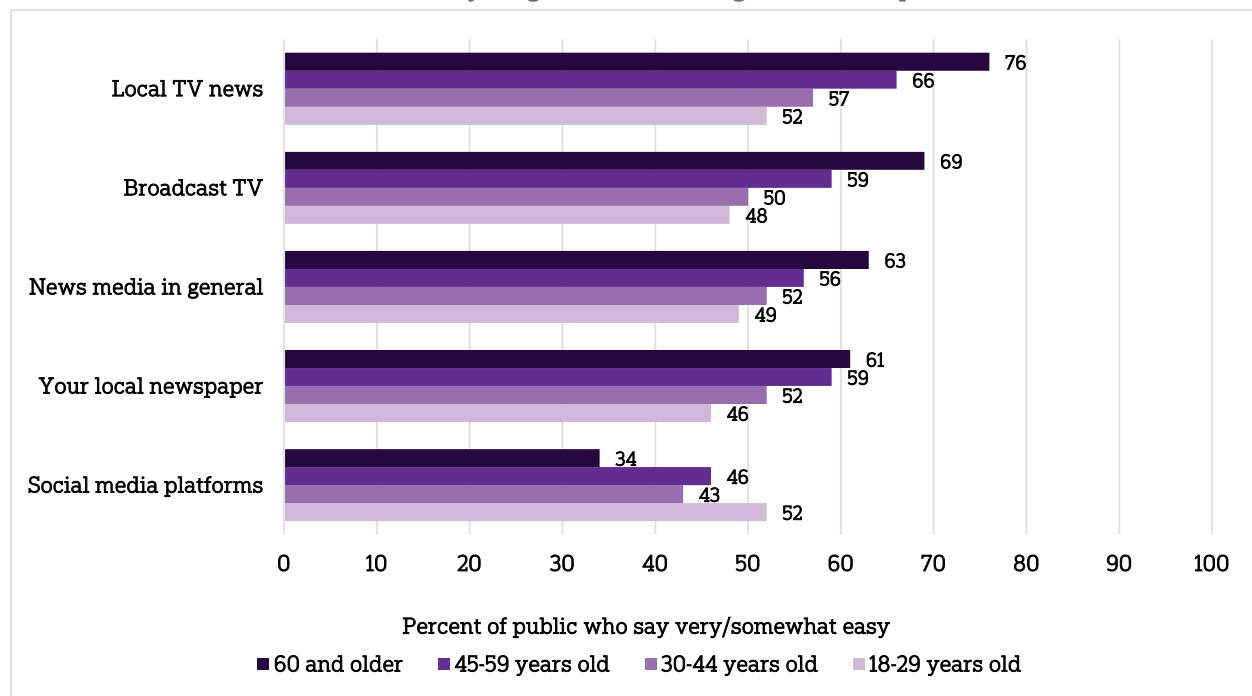
Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

There are also differences across age groups when it comes to being able to differentiate news from opinion for various types of media outlets.

Older adults report having an easier time than younger adults in differentiating news from opinion with traditional broadcast and print media.

In contrast, younger adults are more likely than older adults to say they have an easier time differentiating news from opinion on social media. Moreover, adults age 18-29 are as likely to say it is easy to differentiate news from opinion on either social media or online-only websites as traditional media.

Older adults have an easier time than younger differentiating news from opinion in traditional media



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 each of the following?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

There are also some age differences when it comes to the definition of fake news.

Older adults tend to have a broader definition of what constitutes fake news than do younger adults, especially when it comes to conspiracy theories and unsubstantiated rumors. Seventy-three percent of adults age 60 or older and 68 percent of adults age 45-59 say an outlet passing along conspiracy theories is fake news, compared with 57 percent of those age 30-44 and 51 percent of those age 18-29 who say the same.

Likewise, 52 percent of the oldest adults say news stories that are unfair or sloppy are fake news, compared with 33 percent of the youngest adults.

ALTHOUGH YOUNG ADULTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE TAKEN A MEDIA LITERACY CLASS OR STARTED A BLOG, OLDER ADULTS REPORT MORE FAMILIARITY WITH COMMON JOURNALISTIC TERMS.

Despite younger adults having more experience with media literacy courses and creating media themselves, there is a notable age gap in the understanding of journalistic concepts.

The news literacy movement in schools is about 10 years old, and you can see that difference in the data. But you can also see that the penetration rates, even among the young, are still relatively modest.

Nearly 1 in 4 adults age 18-29 (23 percent) report having taken a media literacy class (23 percent), compared with 18 percent of those 30-44 years old, 16 percent of those 45-59 years old, and 10 percent of those age 60 and older. Those differences may not be as striking as some may have expected.

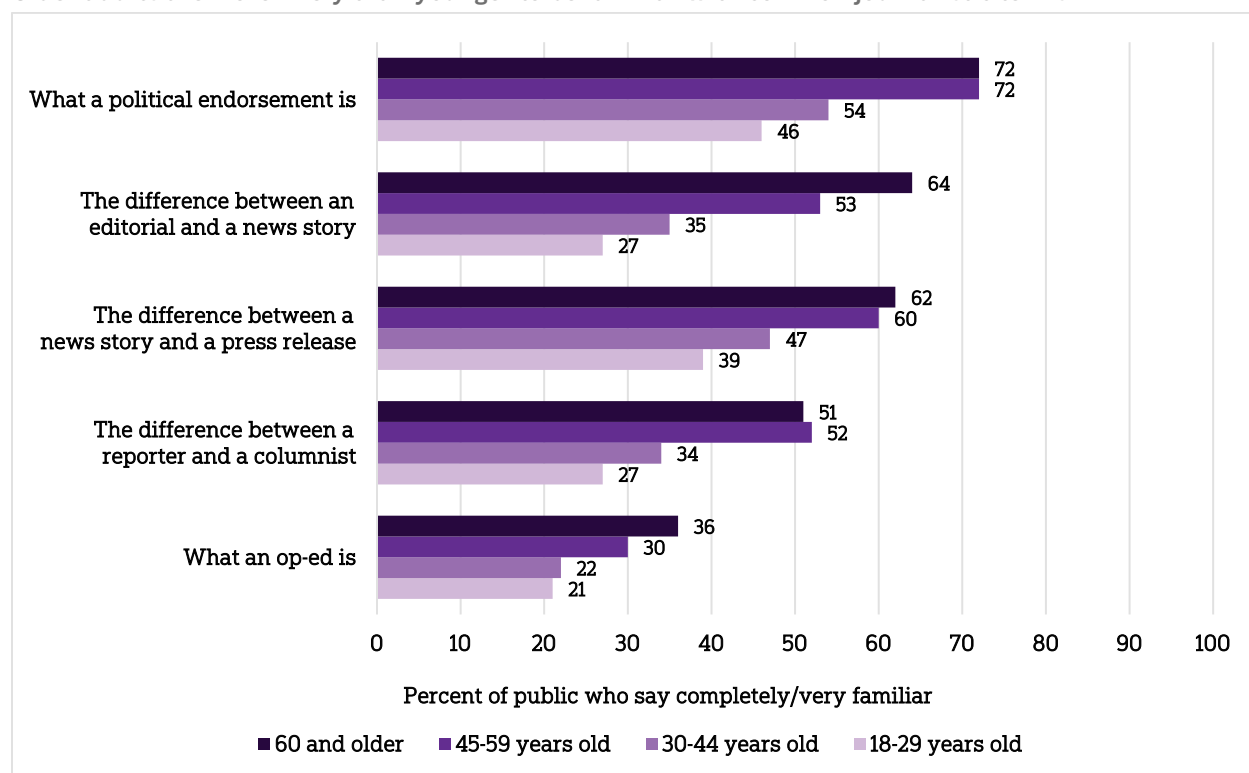
Younger adults are significantly more likely than older adults to have started a blog or social media account to create news or non-personal content. Eighteen percent of adults age 18-29 and 11 percent of those age 30-44 have started such a blog or social media account to create news, compared with 5 percent of those age 45-59 and 3 percent of those age 60 and older.

Yet, there are no age-related differences when it comes to having participated in a school news organization or having taken a journalism class.

Although they are less likely to say they took a media literacy class, older adults are significantly more likely to report being very or completely familiar with common journalistic terms such as “political endorsement” or “op-ed.” There are especially large age gaps in familiarity when it comes to differences between an editorial and a news story or the differences between a reporter and a columnist.

This is another indication that journalistic terminology with origins in print may not be resonating with all Americans. In this case, while the youngest Americans have grown up in a media-saturated world, the journalistic words that media inherited are not breaking through.

Older adults are more likely than younger to be familiar with common journalistic terms



Question: “Next is a list of different terms or concepts that sometimes appear in journalism and media but may or may not be familiar to most people. How familiar are you with each term or concept?”

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

HOW MUCH REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS TRUST OR UNDERSTAND THE NEWS MEDIA

PARTISANSHIP DRIVES PERCEPTIONS, TRUST, AND OPINIONS TOWARD MEDIA.

It should come as no surprise today that the partisan divide over news is a troubling and significant issue as the United States comes to grips with a polarized political landscape. The data, above, about general differences in many ways offer a path beyond those differences via efforts to increase clarity and transparency, among others.

Our division in this survey, by which we ask people to name a source they follow closely and track their attitudes toward it, shows that trust in general is more nuanced. But there are some basic differences between partisans when it comes to the news that are worth noting.

KEEPING UP WITH THE NEWS, SEEKING IT OUT, AND USING FAVORITE SOURCES

Democrats are more likely to say that it is important to keep up with news and information – a finding similar to that of previous Media Insight Project studies. Yet, people of both parties seek out news in general at similar rates.

This study reveals a nuance that Democrats are somewhat more likely than others to say they read deeply into stories (47 percent for Democrats vs. 35 percent for Republicans vs. 29 percent for independents) and to scan headlines several times a day (46 percent of Democrats, 37 percent of Republicans, and 27 percent of independents).

At the same time, there are no differences across party identification when it comes to focusing on news reporting more than on opinion pieces.

DEMOCRATS ARE GENERALLY MORE POSITIVE, EVEN WHEN IT COMES TO THEIR OWN PREFERRED NEWS SOURCES.

Again, this survey finds that Democrats have a more favorable view of the press in general. Six in 10 Democrats have a positive view of journalists as a group, while a majority of Republicans (53 percent) view them negatively, and the largest proportion of independents (44 percent) holds neither positive nor negative views.

We see the same pattern with the view of news organizations in general: A majority of Democrats view them positively, 6 in 10 Republicans view them negatively, and independents are more divided (30 percent positive, 29 percent negative, 40 percent neither).

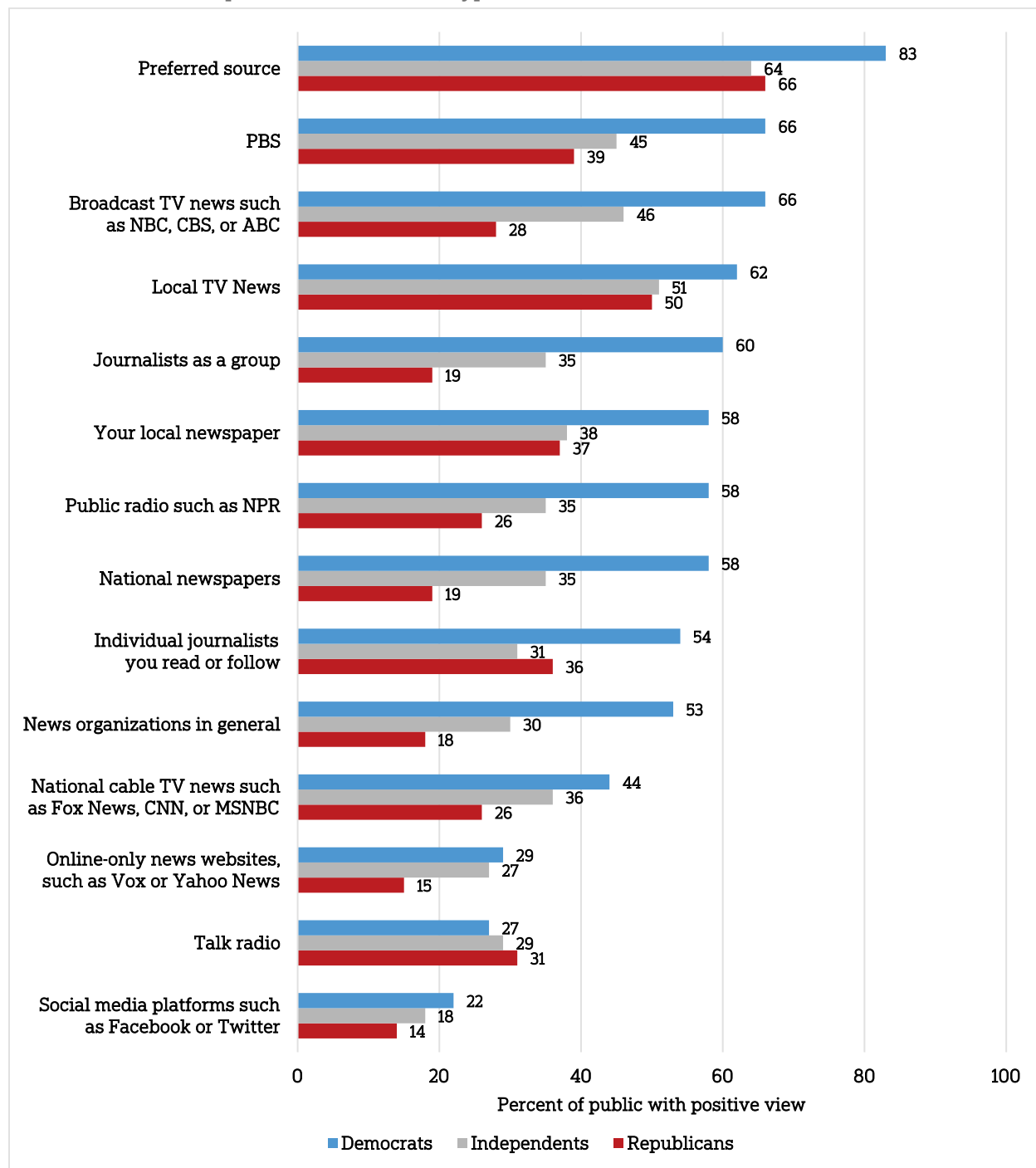
Democrats are also more likely to give a positive rating to their own preferred source than are other groups. Fully 83 percent of Democrats give a positive rating to their preferred news source versus 66 percent of Republicans and 64 percent of independents. These findings are similar to a recent [Media Insight Project study](#) that showed that Democrats find the media they pay for more reliable than do Republicans.

Democrats (54 percent) are also more likely to give a positive rating of journalists they follow – only 36 percent of Republicans and 31 percent of independents do so.

These positive ratings for news media by Democrats also hold true across different media platforms. Democrats are more positive about local newspapers, national newspapers, local TV news, national cable news, broadcast national news, online news websites, public radio, and PBS.

Only on two media types do people across parties agree: All hold more negative than positive views of talk radio and social media.

Democrats hold more positive views of most types of news media



Question: "For each of the following items related to the news media, please indicate whether you have a very positive, somewhat positive, neither positive nor negative, somewhat negative, or very negative view of that item."

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

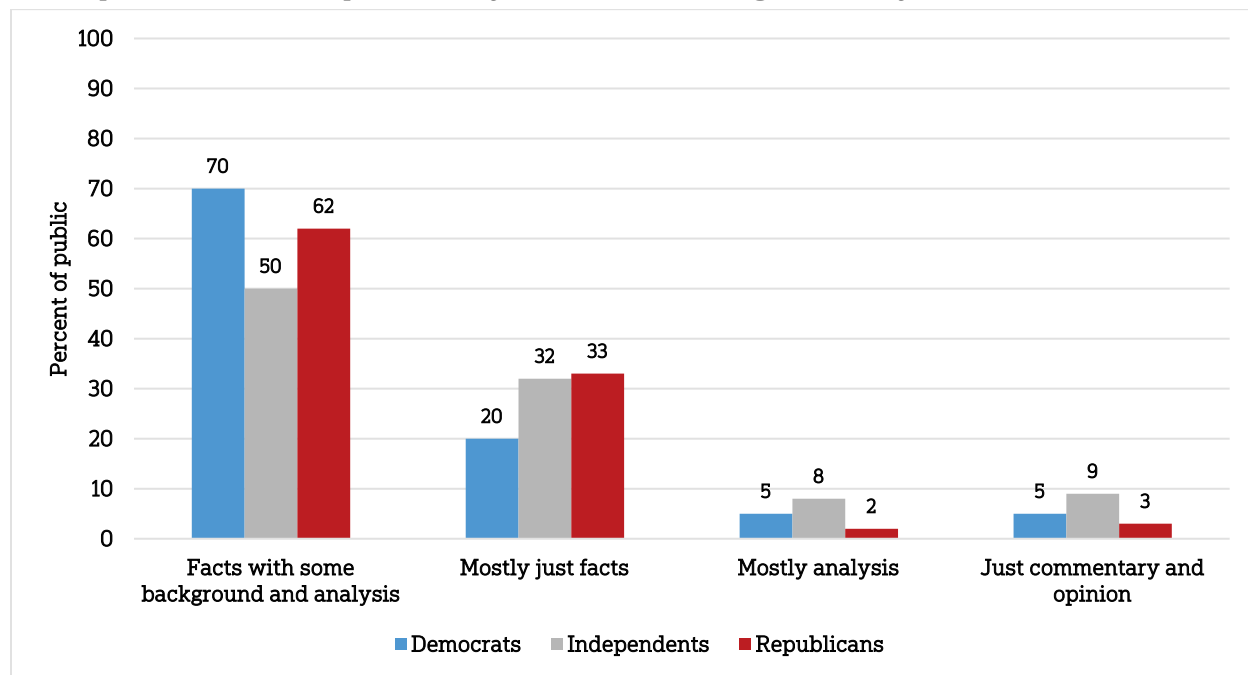
PARTISANS DIVERGE SOMEWHAT ON HOW THEY WANT THE NEWS COVERED. THEY DIFFER EVEN MORE ON HOW THEY THINK NEWS IS ACTUALLY COVERED.

Underlying varying attitudes toward the news media across political groups are differences in how groups perceive the way news is actually covered and its accuracy.

When asked what type of news coverage they find most useful, Democrats (70 percent) are the most likely to say they prefer coverage that mainly includes facts with some background and analysis. More than 6 in 10 independents and half of Republicans also prefer this type of news coverage. A third of Republicans and independents want just the facts, compared to 1 in 5 Democrats.

The perceived reality of what the news media provides, however, is starkly different among partisans. A majority of Republicans (57 percent) think that most news coverage seems like commentary and opinion, as do the largest proportion of independents (40 percent). On the other hand, the largest proportion of Democrats (44 percent) view most news coverage as facts with some background and analysis.

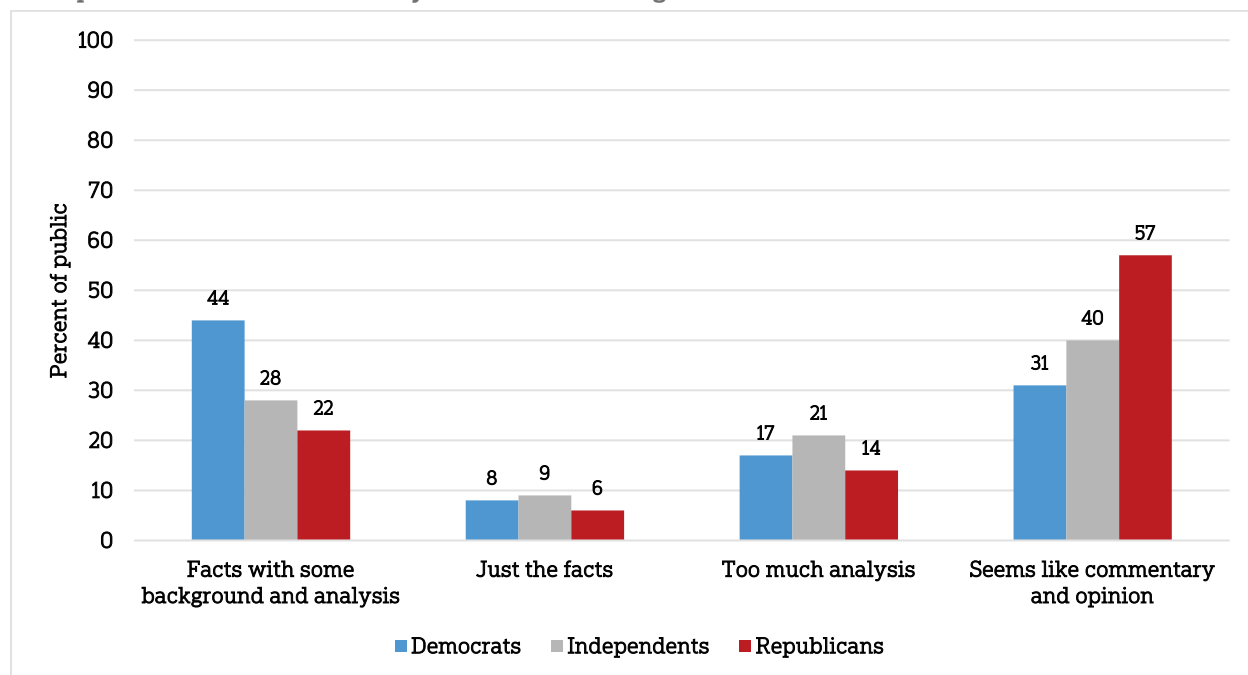
Across parties, most adults prefer mostly facts and some background analysis



Questions: "Next, thinking about when you watch, read, or hear the news, which of the following best describes what you find most useful..."

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

...But partisans differ on what they think news coverage is



Question: "Now, we'd like to ask you about the content of news coverage specifically. Putting aside pure commentary and opinion pieces, which of the following do you think best describes news coverage these days?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Perceptions of the media's accuracy also show a large partisan divide. As 7 in 10 Democrats and a majority of independents (55 percent) think news is fairly accurate, a majority of Republicans (55 percent) say it is fairly inaccurate.

IN GENERAL, DEMOCRATS FIND IT EASIER TO DIFFERENTIATE OPINION AND NEWS. ACROSS PARTIES, AMERICANS AGREE THAT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SOURCES IS KEY TO IMPROVING TRUST.

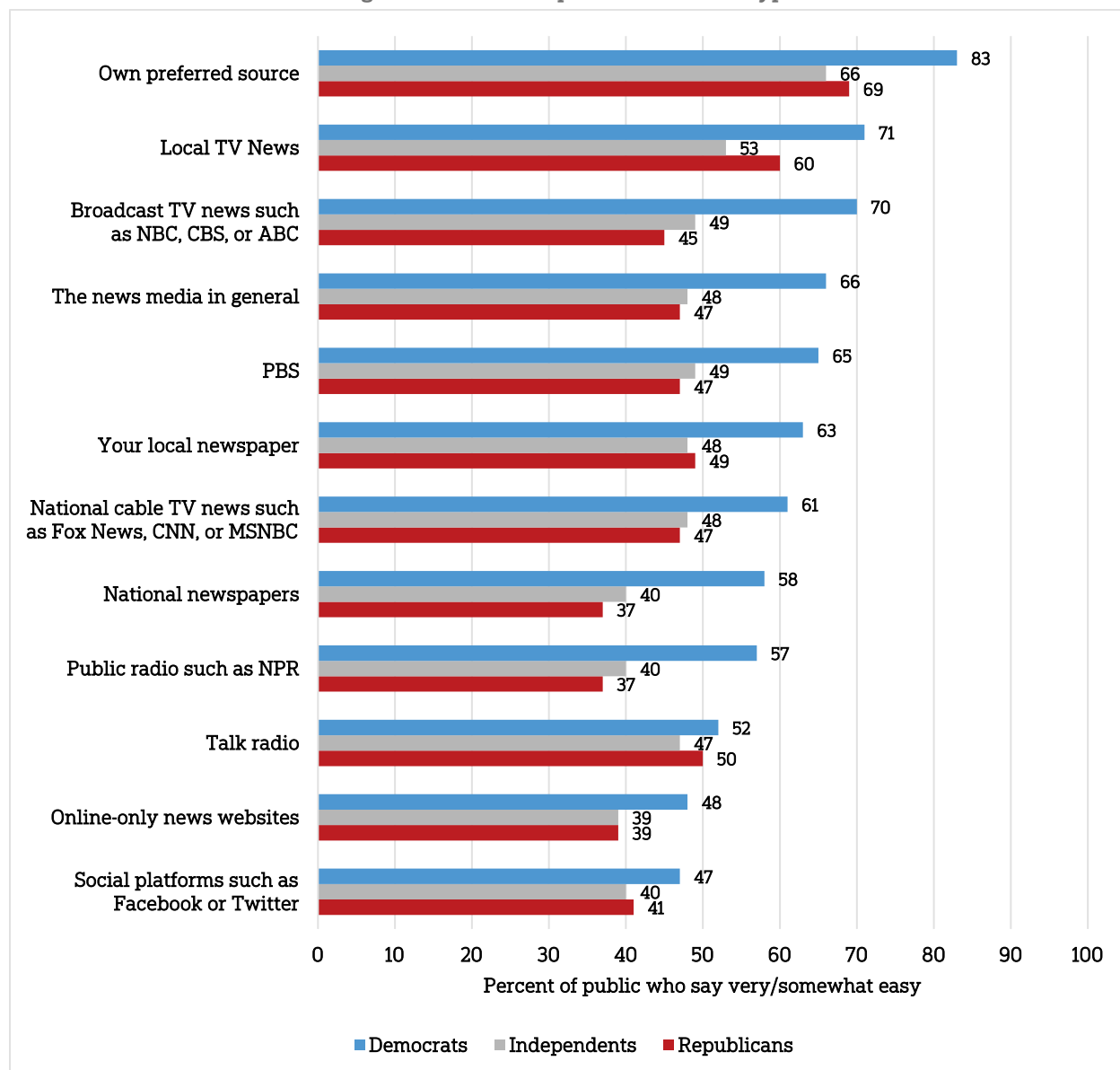
Two-thirds of Democrats say it is easy to distinguish opinion from news in the news media generally, followed by 48 percent of independents and 47 percent of Republicans.

Democrats also have an easier time distinguishing opinion from news via their own preferred news sources (83 percent easy), compared to 69 percent of Republicans and 66 percent of independents.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say it is easy to distinguish opinion from news for every other news source asked about, except for talk radio, where the two agree – about half say it easy to distinguish. These differences between partisans are present even when accounting for standard socioeconomic variables such as education and income.

Partisans agree that it is difficult to distinguish news from opinion on social media, with fewer than half saying it is easy.

Democrats find it easier to distinguish news from opinion on several types of media



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 each of the following?"

Question: "Now thinking about news you see on social platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, how easy or difficult is it for you to tell the difference between opinion content and news reporting?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

As shown in prior [Media Insight Project](#) studies, there is a notable partisan divide in terms of trust in the media in general and even when it comes to partisans own preferred news sources. Democrats are more likely to be trusting in general and of their own sources, and Republicans are the most likely to say their levels of trust in the media have declined in the last year. And when it comes to their own preferred sources, majorities say their levels of trust have neither increased nor decreased in the last year. However, Democrats (37 percent) are more likely than Republicans and independents to say it has increased (28 percent each).

Republicans and Democrats agree that more information about sources is key to improving trust (71 percent of Republicans, 71 percent of Democrats, and 58 percent of independents).

THERE ARE SHARP DIFFERENCES IN GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEWS INDUSTRY ACROSS PARTIES.

Varying levels of trust and perceptions of accuracy in the media are shaped by diverging views across parties on general perceptions of the news media. While 56 percent of Democrats say the news industry is headed in the right direction, 77 percent of Republicans and 52 percent of independents say it is headed in the wrong direction.

Further, asked about the role of the media in American democracy, a plurality of Democrats (43 percent) say the news media protects democracy, half of Republicans (49 percent) say it hurts it, and independents are divided (14 percent protects, 20 percent hurts, 63 percent neither).

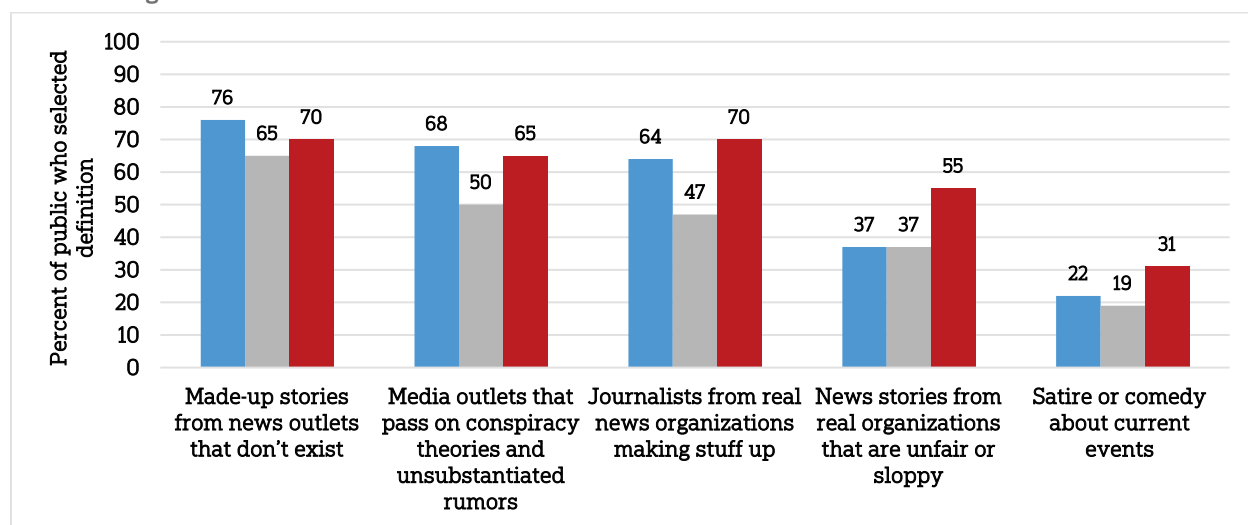
On the media's ideological balance, opinions diverge even more widely by party, with 64 percent of Democrats saying it is just about right, but 3 in 4 Republicans saying it is too liberal. About half of independents (49 percent) say it is just about right.

PARTISANS AGREE ON SOME DEFINITIONS OF THE TERM “FAKE NEWS,” AND DISAGREE ON OTHERS.

How is the term “fake news” perceived by partisans – do they agree on what it entails? The answer from the survey is mixed. Seven in 10 Republicans and 3 in 4 Democrats agree that made-up news stories from news outlets that don't exist constitutes fake news. Similar proportions of partisans also say media outlets passing on conspiracy theories and journalists from real news organizations making stuff up counts as fake news.

The biggest differences emerge on the definition of fake news as unfair or sloppy reporting from real news organizations. A majority of Republicans (55 percent) ascribe fake news to this kind of poor reporting, compared to fewer than 4 in 10 Democrats and independents. Less than a third across parties think satire about current events is fake news, though Republicans are the most likely to identify it as such.

Partisans agree on several definitions of “fake news”



Question: “You may have heard about ‘fake news’ stories. Which of the following would you call ‘fake news’?”

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

Partisans who selected definitions of fake news are inclined to agree that the issues described are major problems for the news industry. More than 3 in 4 across parties consider four of the five definitions provided to be major problems – made-up stories from news outlets that don’t exist, outlets passing along unsubstantiated rumors, journalists from real organizations making stuff up, and also news stories from real organizations that are unfair or sloppy. The exception was satire – while 77 percent of Republicans who selected this definition think it is a major problem for the news media, fewer independents (54 percent) and less than half of Democrats (43 percent) who selected this definition agree.

PARTISANS DO AGREE ON SOME PRIORITIES FOR THE NEWS INDUSTRY, THOUGH DEMOCRATS PLACE HIGHER LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE ON SEVERAL POTENTIAL MEDIA ROLES.

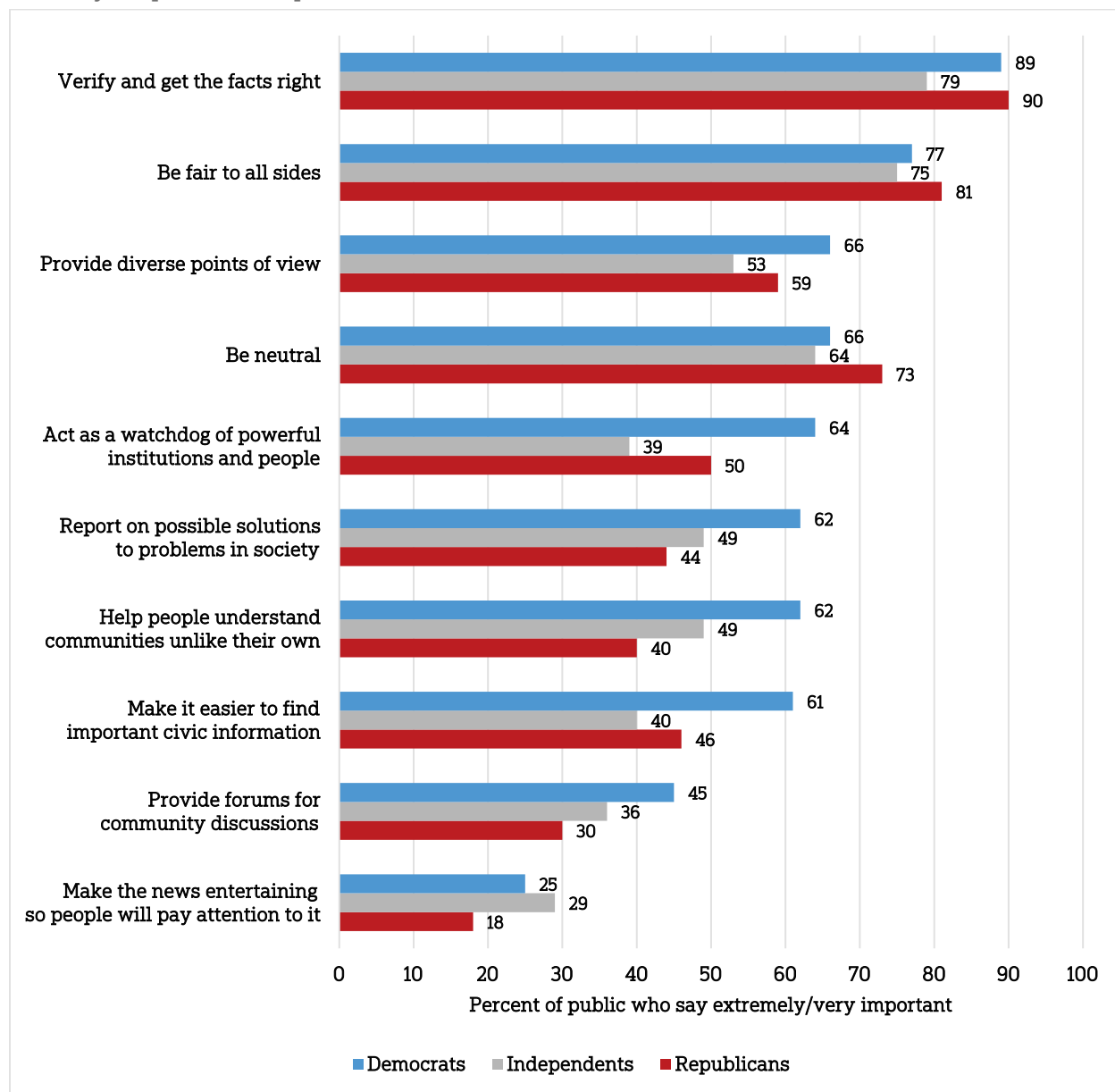
Across parties, people agree that a highly important role of the media is to verify and get facts right. About nine in 10 Republicans and Democrats indicate this is an extremely or very important job of the news media, as do about 8 in 10 independents.

Across parties, the public also places a high importance on fairness, neutrality, and diverse points of view. At least 3 in 4 independents (75 percent), Democrats (77 percent), and Republicans (81 percent) say being fair to all sides is an extremely or very important role of the news media. More than 6 in 10 independents (64 percent), 2 in 3 Democrats (66 percent), and over 7 in 10 Republicans (73 percent) also indicate that being neutral is highly important. Majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents think the news media should also try to provide diverse points of view.

Partisans’ views on the importance of some values of the industry do vary to a degree. For example, 64 percent of Democrats think it is extremely or very important that journalists be watchdogs of institutions and people, compared to half of Republicans and 4 in 10 independents. About 6 in 10 Democrats (62 percent) also think it is important for the media to help people understand communities unlike their own, while fewer than half of independents (49 percent) and Republicans (40 percent) think this is important.

Democrats are also more likely to prioritize the media’s role in reporting on solutions to problems in society. Further, while less than half across parties think it is critical for the media to provide forums for community discussions, Democrats are the most likely to say they should.

Americans across parties think providing factual information, being fair and neutral, and providing diversity of opinion are important



Question: "Next, how important do you think each of the following is for the news media to try to do?"

Source: Media Insight Project poll conducted March 21-April 17, 2018, with 2,019 adults nationwide.

METHODOLOGY

This study 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 study was funded by API. Staff from API and The AP-NORC Center collaborated on all aspects of the study.

GENERAL PUBLIC SURVEY

The survey was conducted from March 21 through April 17, 2018. 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). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

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 2,019 completed the survey – 1,847 via the web and 172 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 30.2 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 33.7 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 88.1 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 9.0 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.0 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive for completing the survey. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish, depending on respondent preference. Phone interviews were conducted 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. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2017 Current Population Survey. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

JOURNALIST SURVEY

The survey was conducted from March 1 through April 12, 2018. The study was designed to reach a representative sample of newsroom personnel with editorial or reporting responsibilities. To reach this target population, we drew a sample across different types of outlets and job titles, using a database of media contacts maintained by Cision Media Research (available to the public through a paid account). The sample was drawn along three dimensions – job title, outlet type, and whether the outlet was a national or local organization. The Cision Media Research database may not include some members of the target population, including new journalists or those working at certain outlets not covered by the database. Contacts from the following job titles were included in the sample:

- Assignment Editor
- Calendar Editor
- Editor
- Editorial Coordinator
- Host/Anchor
- News Director
- Producer
- Program Director
- Public Service/Community Affairs Director
- Reporter/Writer
- Station Manager
- Web Content Producer

Contacts with those job titles were then narrowed down to include only those who worked at outlet categories in the following groups:

- Cable/satellite – network/station
- Cable/satellite program
- Magazine, consumer
- Magazine, news and business
- Newspaper
- Newspaper publisher
- Newspaper, community
- Newspaper, neighborhood/classified
- Online, consumer (includes some news sites)
- Online, news and business
- Radio network
- Radio program
- Radio program, national
- Radio program, regional
- Radio station
- TV network
- TV program
- TV program, national
- TV program, regional
- TV station
- Wire service

Journalists in this database were classified as working for either “major national outlets” or “minor national outlets or local outlets.” Major national outlets include the following, with all others classified as minor national outlets or local outlets.

Newspapers:

- The New York Times
- The Washington Post
- USA Today
- The Wall Street Journal

Magazines (circulation of 2 million or greater based on Alliance for Audited Media 2017 data)⁶:

- Better Homes and Gardens
- Game Informer
- Good Housekeeping
- Family Circle
- People
- Woman’s Day
- National Geographic
- Sports Illustrated
- Time
- Reader’s Digest
- Cosmopolitan
- Southern Living
- Taste of Home
- Shape
- O, The Oprah Magazine
- Glamour
- Parents
- Redbook
- ESPN The Magazine
- American Rifleman
- FamilyFun
- Martha Stewart Living
- Real Simple
- Seventeen

Television:

- ABC
- CBS
- NBC
- PBS

⁶ <http://abcas3.auditedmedia.com/ecirc/magtitlesearch.asp>

- CNN
- C-SPAN
- MSNBC/CNBC
- FOX Cable News/FOX Business News
- Telemundo
- Univision
- ESPN/ESPN2

Newswires:

- Associated Press
- Bloomberg News
- McClatchy Newspapers
- Reuters

In total, 5,022 sample lines were classified as major national outlets, and 72,514 sample lines were classified as minor national/local outlets. Of these 77,536 sample lines, 75,488 contained working email addresses. These 75,488 journalists from U.S. major national, minor national, and local outlets with working email addresses were mainly from the United States (all 50 states and territories) with some sample lines in Canada. They were all contacted by email to participate in the survey, and interviews were conducted online using the Qualtrics platform. The survey confirmed eligibility (adults working for an organization that reports on the news). Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive (\$15) for completing the survey. All interviews were conducted in English.

The final sample is made up of 1,127 completed interviews with journalists, including 1,120 in the United States and seven in Canada. The response rate is 1.5 percent. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

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 the type of media outlet the respondent worked for (television, radio, newspaper, magazine, online/digital, news wire, or other) and whether the outlet the respondent worked for was considered a national or local organization. The weighted data, which reflect the drawn sample of newsroom personnel, were used for all analyses.

All analyses were conducted using STATA (version 14), which allows for adjustment of standard errors for complex sample designs. All differences reported between subgroups of the U.S. population are at the 95 percent level of statistical significance, meaning that there is only a 5 percent (or less) probability that the observed differences could be attributed to chance variation in sampling. Additionally, bivariate differences between subgroups are only reported when they also remain robust in a multivariate model controlling for other demographic, political, and socioeconomic covariates.

Full topline for each survey and details about the Media Insight Project can be found at www.mediainsight.org. For more information, please contact info@apnorc.org.

CONTRIBUTING RESEARCHERS

From the American Press Institute

Tom Rosenstiel
Kevin Loker
Jeff Sonderman
Katie Kutsko
Jane Elizabeth
Katherine Ellis

From NORC at the University of Chicago

Nicole Willcoxon
David Sterrett
Dan Malato
Liz Kantor
Jennifer Benz
Trevor Thompson
Xian Tao

From The Associated Press

Emily Swanson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Media Insight Project would like to thank the following experts for providing helpful suggestions and feedback on the study design: Talia Stroud at The Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin, Joy Mayer of Trusting News at University of Missouri, Eric Newton and Dan Gilmor of News Co / Lab at Arizona State University, Seth Lewis of the School of Journalism and Communication at the University of Oregon, and Logan Molyneux of Klein College of Media and Communication at Temple University.

We also drew upon prior research and conversations with: Sally Lehrman at The Trust Project at Santa Clara University, Alan Miller of The News Literacy Project, Indira Lakshmanan and Alexios Mantzarlis of the Poynter Institute, and Emily Bell at the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University.

The views and findings in this report reflect those of the Media Insight Project, and may not reflect those of the experts.

ABOUT THE MEDIA INSIGHT PROJECT

The Media Insight Project is a collaboration of the American Press Institute (API) 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) advances an innovative and sustainable local news industry by helping publishers understand and engage audiences, grow revenue, improve public-service journalism, and succeed at organizational change. API is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization affiliated with the News Media Alliance. It works with and draws on the best ideas from technology, business, and publishing.

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.