

A GALLUP/KNIGHT FOUNDATION SURVEY

# American Views 2022: Part 1

## News in America: Public Good or Private Enterprise?

OCTOBER 2022



The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's Trust, Media and Democracy initiative aims to address the decline in trust for journalism and other democratic institutions by examining the causes and supporting solutions.

As part of the multidisciplinary initiative launched in 2017, Knight Foundation partnered with Gallup on a research series to better understand Americans' evolving relationship with the media and to inform solutions to the information challenges of our day.

Knight Foundation is also investing in technologists, journalists, academic institutions and others with strong, innovative approaches to improve the flow of accurate information, prevent the spread of misinformation and better inform communities.

Knight Foundation believes that democracy thrives when communities are informed and engaged.

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# Overview

**“... were it left to me to decide whether we should have government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”**

*Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to Edward Carrington as a delegate to the Continental Congress in 1787<sup>1</sup>*

The health of a democracy depends in no small part on the vitality of an independent press. Studies across the world continue to demonstrate that access to a robust news system, free from institutional censorship or influence, plays an essential role in effective democracy.<sup>2</sup>

Since 2017, Gallup and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation have partnered to study the news media's role in American democracy. Much of this work has focused on Americans' expectations and evaluations of the news in delivering on its civic promise to inform the public. Previous reports presented sobering data on citizens' rising perceptions of bias in national news organizations and the entrenchment of partisan divides when it comes to trusting well-established sources of information.

While 81% of Americans in 2020 said the news media was “critical” or “very important” to democracy, waning faith in American institutions and nearly universal concern about misinformation online may be undermining public confidence in the stability of our democracy. A Quinnipiac University poll released in August 2022 reports that 67% of Americans believe the nation's democracy is in danger of collapse, up from 58% in January.<sup>3</sup>

A robust press is vital to a stable democracy. But reliable news that is accessible to all and free from influence requires resources. Gallup/Knight Foundation's 2019 report, *Putting a Price Tag on Local News*, offered a look at the financial security of local news and revealed a concerning “market gap”: A majority of Americans saw great value in their local press and believed everyone should have free access to it, but very few had ever paid for it. Furthermore, 56% of Americans mischaracterized the state of local news as doing well financially while outlets continued to close across the country. The Americans surveyed did show some sign of hope, however, expressing support for federal or local government subsidies to help keep local news alive.

This report is Part 1 of the Gallup/Knight Foundation *American Views 2022* two-part study. It builds off previous work, focusing on Americans' attitudes and behaviors that impact the long-term viability of the industry itself. Part 2 of the series will dive deeper into what drives Americans' trust in news. The data show that positive attitudes about the media correlate with perceptions of the news prioritizing its public good over private enterprise and greater willingness to pay for news.

A deeper investigation into Americans' attitudes about funding the news in Part 1 was also motivated by the voices of American news consumers themselves. In the fall of 2021, Gallup/Knight ran a series of focus groups in which participants were asked: What is the role of news in America today? Across focus groups of all ages and political party affiliations, an overwhelming majority of participants said news organizations' primary goal is to make money. Many emphasized that even if journalists have good intentions to inform the public, the pressure from corporate owners to drive revenue overshadows those efforts.

1 Ford, P. L. (Ed.). (1905). *The works of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 5 (correspondence 1786-1789)*. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

2 Gentzkow, M., Glaeser, E. L., & Goldin, C. (2006). The rise of the fourth estate. How newspapers became informative and why it mattered. In E. L. Glaeser & C. Goldin (Eds.), *Corruption and reform: Lessons from America's economic history* (pp. 187-230). University of Chicago Press; Stearns, J., & Schmidt, C. (2022, September 15). *How we know journalism is good for democracy*. Democracy Fund. <https://democracyfund.org/idea/how-we-know-journalism-is-good-for-democracy/>

3 *Biden's approval rating surges after hitting low mark in July, Quinnipiac University national poll finds; half of Americans say Trump should be prosecuted on criminal charges over his handling of classified documents* | Poll. (2022, August 31). Quinnipiac University. <https://poll.qu.edu/poll-release?releaseid=3854>

*“Most [journalists] are trying to do a good job and not trying to mistreat things. But then, you have the total machine that’s trying to make a profit, trying to drive clicks, and that’s greater than the single journalist who [is] actually writing the news and trying to get the message to the masses ... So, I think, generally, they’re trying to do a good job and trying to inform the public, but then the system doesn’t necessarily help with that.”*

— FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, AGED 18-35

Focus group participants expressed a keen awareness of the business realities of U.S. news organizations in today’s highly competitive news market. They also hit on a central contradiction of the U.S. news media: It is an institution with critical public duties within a system of little public funding. For example, government funding for public broadcasting in America (e.g., CPB, PBS, NPR) is comparatively low across developed democracies. A 2021 study by Timothy Neff and Victor Pickard on media funding found that only 32% of revenue for public broadcasting in the U.S. comes from public support — ranking it in the bottom four of the 33 countries reviewed in the study.<sup>4</sup> For comparison, government backing of public broadcasting makes up 63% of funding in the United Kingdom, 71% in Canada, 86% in France, 94% in Sweden and 97% in Japan. Most importantly, their analysis shows that the combination of secure government funding and legal protections for independence correlate with the overall health of a country’s democratic system using the EIU Democracy Index.<sup>5</sup>

The U.S. news media functions as an essential public good by providing the information necessary for citizens to engage in the democratic process. However, the results from this study show that most Americans think news organizations prioritize business needs above their service to the public. Fitting with long-standing resistance among many Americans to pay for news, the widespread perception of the news as first and foremost a private enterprise does not translate into more willingness to pay for it. In fact, 47% of Americans say it is “never” reasonable for individuals to have to pay for news.

American news organizations rely almost entirely on advertising, subscription revenue or donations to support their civic role. This study finds that people most widely support an advertising-based system, but this model may not be sustainable for all types of news outlets. Pew Research Center reports subscriptions to newspapers are at an all-time low, and while digital advertising is increasing its share of newspaper revenue, it is not gaining enough ground to combat the growing decline in overall advertising revenue and decreasing profitability.<sup>6</sup> Pew also reports that, across news outlet types, cable news is seeing the most growth in viewership, advertising and revenue.<sup>7</sup>

However, findings from this report show that — under certain conditions and especially for younger adults — the public is open to a variety of funding resources for news. For example, many Americans report being open to government funding, depending on the content and recipient being funded. Younger Americans appear to also support add-on services from news organizations, such as newsletters and events, as additional avenues for revenue. It is critical to continue to track Americans’ attitudes about paying for news over time as leaders in the news media industry develop innovative products and solutions for stagnant revenue. Not just because these attitudes help increase understanding of Americans as consumers but also because news organizations’ ability to address Americans’ civic information needs depends on it.

4 Neff, T., & Pickard V. (2021). Funding democracy: Public media and democratic health in 33 countries. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 194016122110602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211060255>

5 See *Democracy index 2019*. (2020, January 22). The Economist Intelligence Unit. <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index/>. The United States ranks 25th in the world on this index as of 2019.

6 Newspaper fact sheet. (2021, June 29). *Pew Research Center*: <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/newspapers/>

7 Cable news fact sheet. (2021, July 13). *Pew Research Center*: <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/cable-news/>

# Executive Summary

1

## **Most Americans think news organizations prioritize business needs and financial goals over public service.**

- Three in four U.S. adults (76%) believe news organizations are first and foremost businesses, motivated by their financial interests and goals. Only 12% say news organizations are first and foremost civic institutions, motivated by serving the public interest.
- Sixty-two percent of Americans believe most news organizations prioritize staying in business over serving the public; only 6% say most news organizations lean toward providing a public service.
  - Thirty percent think news organizations balance these motivations well.
  - Younger U.S. adults (particularly Gen Z) are more likely than older Americans to say news organizations prioritize business and financial goals over public service.
- Those with more favorable views of the news media are more likely to say news organizations prioritize civic duties.
  - Fifty-eight percent of Americans with “very favorable” opinions of the news media believe news organizations balance staying in business and public service well, and an additional 29% say news organizations are first and foremost civic institutions.

2

## **More than seven in 10 Americans report having never paid a news organization directly for news.**

- Among the 26% who have paid for news, subscriptions are the most cited form of payment, followed by donations and memberships.
- Certain segments of the American public are also more likely to have paid directly for news — including those with higher levels of income and education, Democrats, and White Americans.
  - Although younger adults generally consume less news than older adults, millennials are more likely to have directly paid for it.
- Americans who get their news primarily from printed newspapers and magazines report the highest levels of having paid for news (50%), followed by those who consume news mostly through radio (35%) and online (30%).
  - Those who primarily consume television news report the lowest levels of paying directly for news (16%), not accounting for any news already included in cable or streaming television subscriptions.
- Thirty-three percent of Americans who hold favorable opinions of the news media say they have paid directly for news, compared with 24% of those with unfavorable opinions.

3

## **Only 17% of Americans say they would pay to access news in the future, but if they have paid before, they are more willing to pay again.**

- Forty-nine percent of U.S. adults who have paid for news in the past say they would pay for news in the future, compared with only 6% of those who have not.

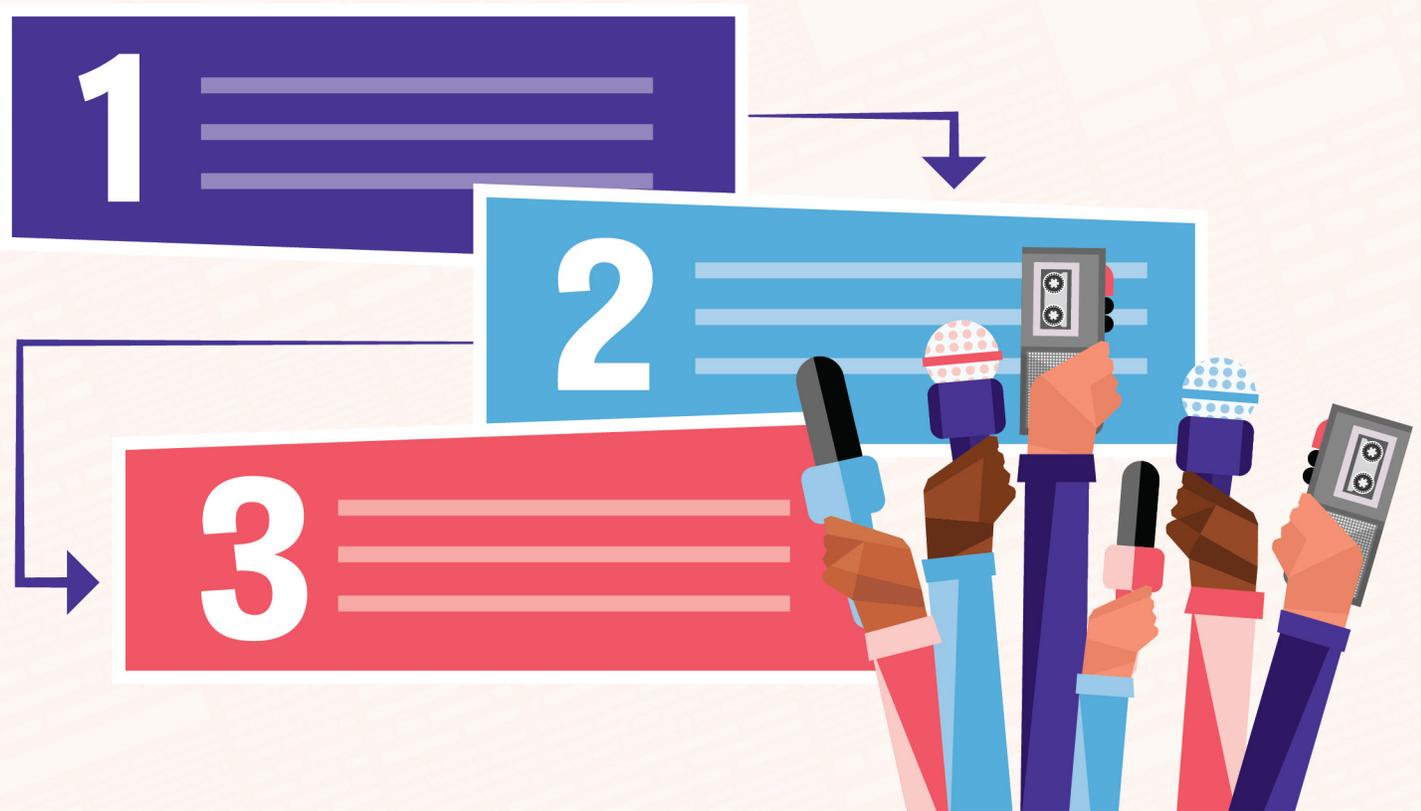
- Twenty-five percent of Americans with favorable opinions of the news media would pay to access news in the future, compared with just 14% of those with unfavorable opinions of the news media.
- The same Americans who are more likely to have paid for news in the past — younger adults, Democrats and those with higher incomes — are also more willing to pay in the future.
  - Thirty-four percent of those earning a household income over \$150K say they would pay for news in the future. That number steadily declines as income declines, with only 10% of those earning less than \$50K reporting they would pay for news in the future.
- When Americans encounter a paywall online, 48% report trying to access the information somewhere else for free.
  - Twenty-eight percent move on to something else or a different news story.

#### **4 Advertising is the most widely supported form of funding for news.**

- Thirty percent of Americans say it is reasonable for news organizations to make money through advertising. Another 62% say it “depends,” with most saying it depends on what is being advertised.
  - Fifty-two percent say news organizations’ largest source of funding should be advertising.
- Twenty-four percent of U.S. adults say donations should “always” be used to ensure news is available to everyone free of charge. Fifty-four percent say it “depends,” primarily on from whom the donations are coming.
- Twenty-two percent say government funding should “always” be used to ensure news is available to everyone free of charge, with an additional 33% saying it “depends.”
  - Roughly equal numbers of respondents say government funding should be used to ensure news is free, depending on the news content and what organizations are receiving the funding.
  - Forty-four percent say government funding should “never” be used.
- Forty-seven percent of Americans say it is “never” reasonable for individuals to have to pay for the news they watch or read.
  - Forty-eight percent say it “depends” — mainly on the content (76%).

#### **5 Expanded information services may open the door to revenue opportunities for news organizations — particularly for younger audiences.**

- Thirty-five percent of Americans say it is reasonable for news organizations to charge people for in-person events. An additional 20% say it “depends.”
  - Twenty-seven percent say it is reasonable to charge for newsletters or direct-to-email content, and 23% say it is reasonable to charge for exclusive or special content.
- Gen Z and millennials, in particular, are more open to paying for special services.
  - Forty-nine percent of Gen Z Americans and 52% of millennials say it is reasonable for news organizations to charge for events.
  - Thirty-five percent of millennials say charging for newsletters or direct-to-email content is reasonable.
  - Thirty-seven percent of Gen Z adults say it is reasonable to charge for exclusive or special content.



# Detailed Findings

## 1 Private Enterprise Over Public Good

The survey results from the latest Gallup/Knight *American Views* study confirm findings from previous qualitative work: Most U.S. adults believe news organizations prioritize staying in business over civic duty. This sentiment is especially potent among younger Americans. And although Democrats are more likely to say news organizations find a balance between profit and public service than Republicans or independents, the majority still report that the news industry in America is first and foremost a business. Beyond political partisanship, Americans who hold more favorable attitudes toward the media and perceive less political bias in reporting are much more likely to say news organizations lean toward public service or balance priorities well and are first and foremost civic institutions.

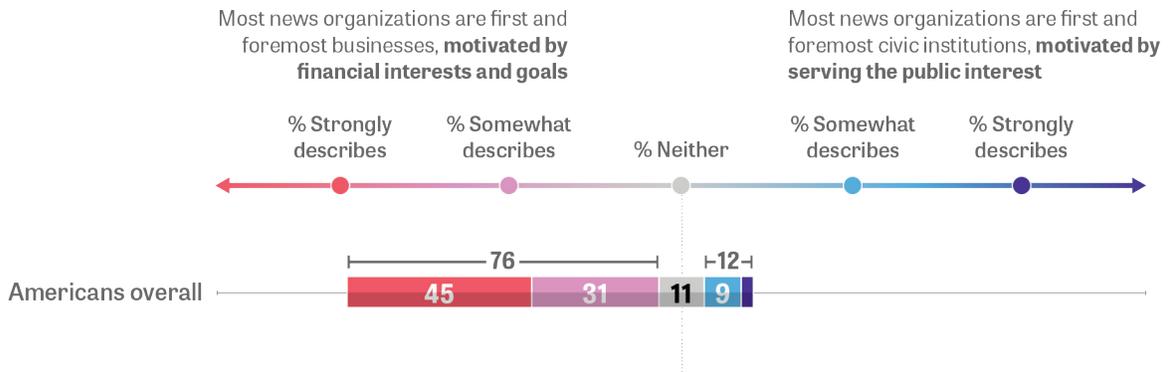
### **Most Americans think money comes before mission at most U.S. news organizations.**

Gallup/Knight asked U.S. adults about the priorities of U.S. news organizations. Only 12% strongly or somewhat agree that most news organizations are “first and foremost civic institutions, motivated by the public interest.” About three in four strongly or somewhat agree that most news organizations are “first and foremost businesses, motivated by financial interests”; 11% say neither.

FIGURE 1

## Perceived Priorities of U.S. News Organizations

Which of the following best describes your opinion?



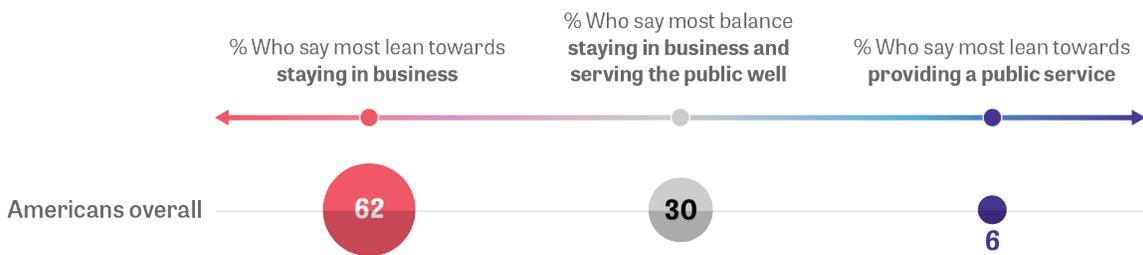
Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%. Values under 5% are not displayed.

Americans were also asked whether they think most news organizations in the U.S. strike a balance between staying in business and providing a public service of informing citizens. Sixty-two percent of Americans believe news organizations lean more toward staying in business; only 6% think news organizations lean toward providing a public service. But 30% of those surveyed think news organizations balance staying in business and public service well.

FIGURE 2

## Views on How Well U.S. News Organizations Balance Staying in Business vs. Serving the Public

Do you think most news organizations in the U.S. balance staying in business with providing a public service of informing citizens?



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

**Younger Americans are more likely to see news organizations as putting business first.**

While majorities of Americans think news organizations prioritize their financial and business needs over public service or civic obligations, that sentiment is not universal. Older Americans, people of color and Democrats are slightly more likely to see news organizations as prioritizing balancing business needs with public service. Younger Americans, on the other hand, are among the most likely to believe news organizations put profit first.

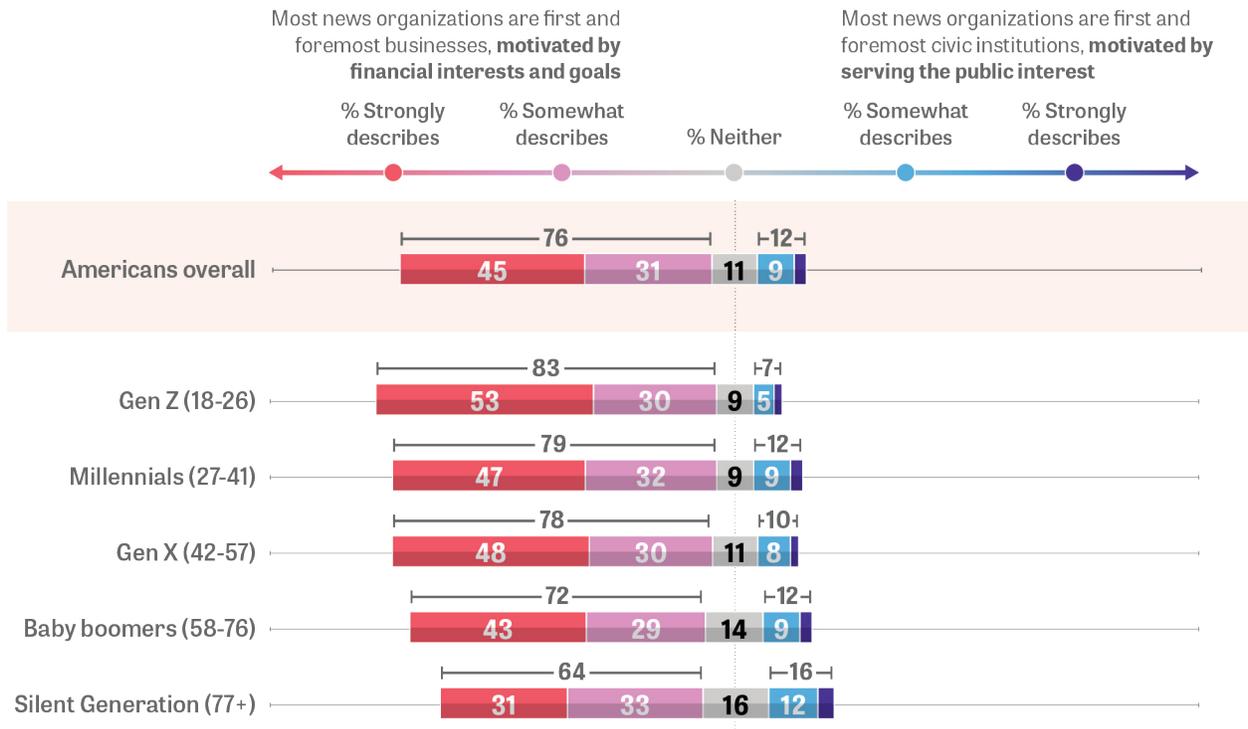
*"I think there's probably a lot of really good journalists out there, but I think for the vast majority it's, you know, 'How can we get traffic? How can I phrase this or spin this in a certain way where I'm going to get the most clicks or views?' In turn, it leads back to ... it's a scheme for money, really."*

— FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, AGED 18-35

FIGURE 3A

**Views of U.S. News Organizations and Their Perceived Priorities, by Age Group**

Which of the following best describes your opinion?



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%. Values under 5% are not displayed.

Gen Z Americans and millennials are more likely than older adults — particularly baby boomers and the Silent Generation — to say news organizations lean toward staying in business rather than public service or balancing the two. And older Americans are more likely to believe news organizations balance staying in business with public service.

FIGURE 3B

## Views of U.S. News Organizations and Their Perceived Priorities, by Age Group

Do you think most news organizations in the U.S. balance staying in business with providing a public service of informing citizens?



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

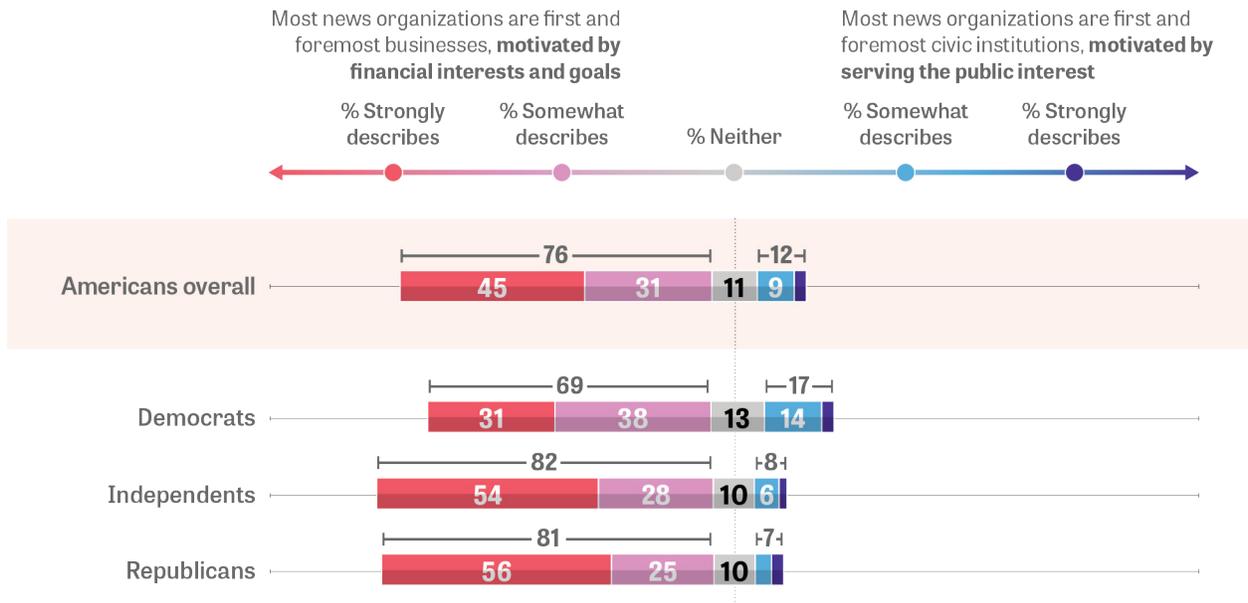
**Democrats are much more likely than Republicans and independents to believe news organizations balance profit with public service.**

About eight in 10 Republicans and independents and nearly seven in 10 Democrats strongly or somewhat agree news organizations are primarily businesses motivated by financial interests instead of civic institutions motivated by serving public interests.

FIGURE 4A

**Views of U.S. News Organizations and Their Perceived Priorities, by Political Party**

Which of the following best describes your opinion?



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%. Values under 5% are not displayed.

However, when asked to consider whether news organizations in the U.S. are able to balance staying in business with providing a public service, Democrats' attitudes are more varied. A comparatively lower number (46%) think the news media prioritizes staying in business, and 45% say it balances its business and public service commitments well. By contrast, more than 70% of Republicans and independents think news organizations lean toward staying in business.

Independents' attitudes about news organizations' priorities shift somewhat when "leaners" — i.e., independents who report leaning toward the Democrat or Republican party — are removed from the analysis. Sixty-five percent of "pure" independents say news organizations lean toward staying in business, while 28% say they balance staying in business and serving the public well.

FIGURE 4B

## Views of U.S. News Organizations and Their Perceived Priorities, by Political Party

Do you think most news organizations in the U.S. balance staying in business with providing a public service of informing citizens?



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

**Favorable attitudes about the news media and perceptions that news organizations prioritize public service go hand in hand.**

Although Democrats are more likely than Republicans or independents to think news organizations balance public service and staying in business, most Democrats perceive the news as having a business-first orientation. Beyond political party affiliation, Gallup/Knight find that the more favorable attitudes Americans have about the media in general, the more likely they are to perceive news organizations as balancing public service with business needs (by as much as 28 percentage points).

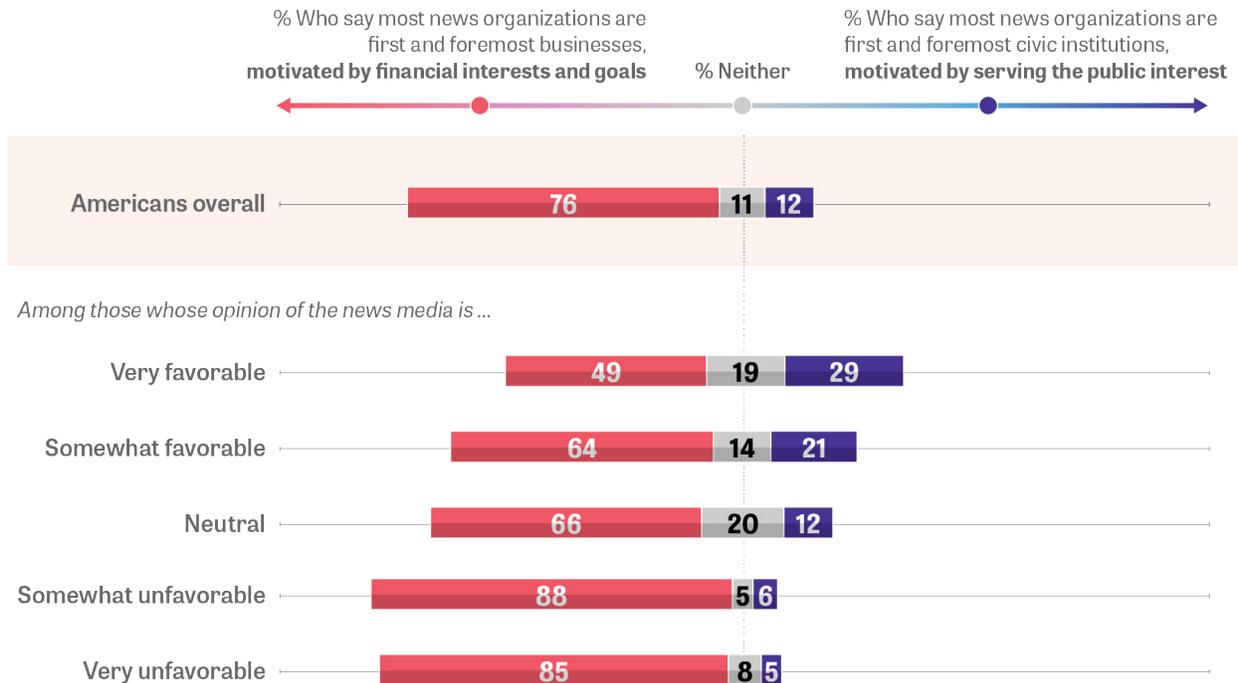
Twenty-nine percent of Americans who hold “very favorable” views of the media say news organizations are first and foremost civic institutions, compared with 12% of the overall public. Those with less favorable attitudes are much more likely to say news organizations are first and foremost businesses.

FIGURE 5A

**Views of U.S. News Organizations and Their Perceived Priorities, by Favorability Toward News Media**

Which of the following best describes your opinion?

(Percentages are the sum of “strongly describes” + “somewhat describes”)



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

Ninety percent of Americans who hold the least favorable views of the U.S. news media say these organizations lean toward staying in business, while only 7% say they balance business and public service priorities well. In contrast, 23% of those who hold very favorable opinions of the news media report news organizations lean toward public service, and 58% say they balance public service and staying in business well.

FIGURE 5B

## Views of U.S. News Organizations and Their Perceived Priorities, by Favorability Toward News Media

Do you think most news organizations in the U.S. balance staying in business with providing a public service of informing citizens?



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

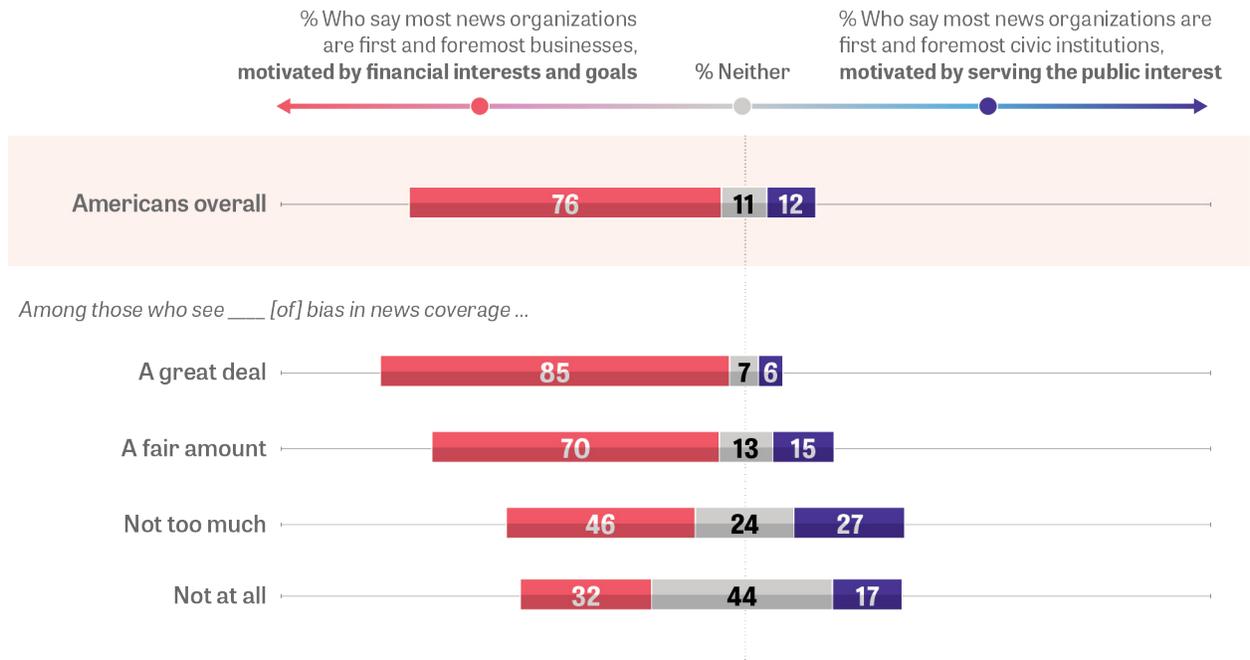
Similarly, Americans' perceptions of political bias in news coverage appear to correlate with their attitudes about the priorities of news organizations. Those who see more political bias in news coverage are much more likely to report that news organizations lean toward staying in business and are first and foremost motivated by financial interests and goals than those who see less political bias.

FIGURE 6A

## Views of U.S. News Organizations and Their Perceived Priorities, by Opinions on Bias in Media Coverage

Which of the following best describes your opinion?

(Percentages are the sum of "strongly describes" + "somewhat describes")

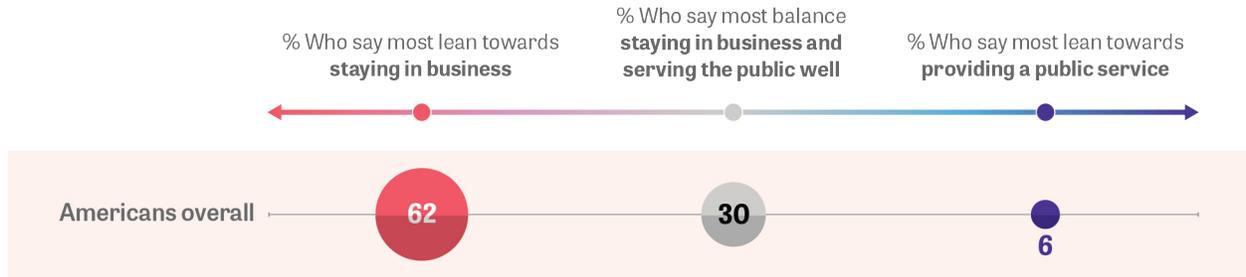


Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

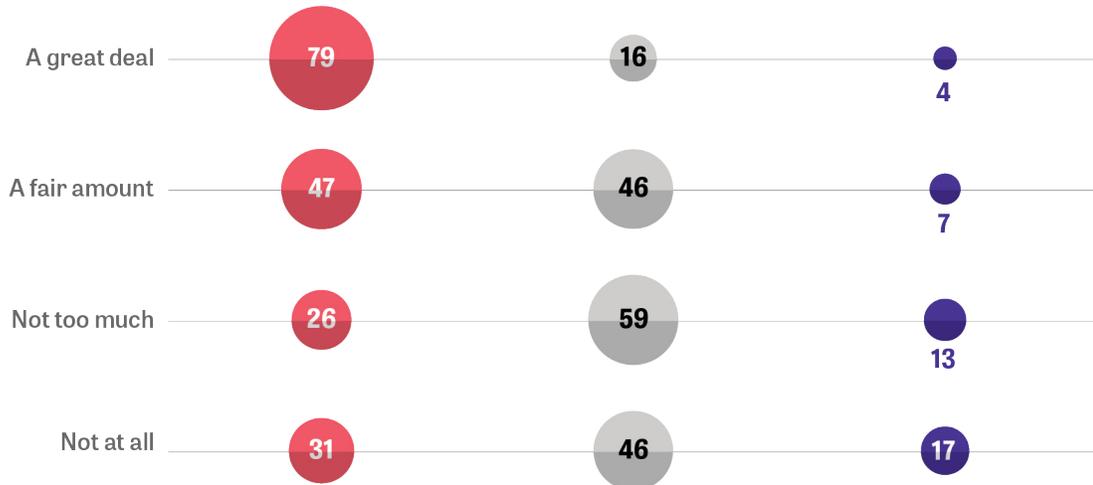
FIGURE 6B

## Views of U.S. News Organizations and Their Perceived Priorities, by Opinions on Bias in Media Coverage

What is your overall opinion of the news media in the United States today?



Among those who see \_\_\_ [of] bias in news coverage ...



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

### **Why this matters: Prioritizing profit over public good may be a matter of survival.**

The results from this study — further supported by the findings from Gallup/Knight focus groups — indicate that most Americans think news organizations prioritize business needs above civic duty. But these two priorities are likely mutually dependent. The press cannot keep the public informed if it lacks the financial resources to stay in business, and news outlets have struggled to stay afloat without the public's confidence in the information they publish.

Easily accessible digital platforms have also shifted public expectations toward an information marketplace mostly free of cost to consumers. Digital advertising-focused business models for websites — such as Google or social media — can lure advertisers. And as described in the overview of this report, Pew Research Center shows that gains in digital advertising are not always enough for newspapers in particular to combat the overall decline in readership and revenue.

The financial health of the news industry is critical to its overall ability to contribute to a democratic and free society. Gallup/Knight find that while most Americans do not report paying for news directly, some are more likely to be receptive to doing so than others. Furthermore, a significant portion of the American public seems open — under certain conditions — to non-advertising means of funding, like through the government and donations, to ensure news is free and accessible to everyone. Young people, in particular, report that these types of funding are reasonable paths for news organizations to pursue for revenue.

*"I think the priority [of news organizations] should be information, not ratings and not making money. But that's not where we are in America. It's all about money, and it's all about power."*

— FOCUS GROUP  
PARTICIPANT, AGED 35-55



## 2 Who Pays for News?

While Section 1 reveals that Americans are more likely to think about the news media as a for-profit enterprise rather than a democratic institution, their behaviors and attitudes about paying directly for news complicate that perception. The data show that very few Americans have paid directly for news, and even fewer are willing to pay in the future — though there is meaningful variation dependent on age, income, education level and partisanship. Those who have already paid are more likely to be open to paying for news in the future, as are those who generally hold more favorable attitudes about the news media.

### **More than seven in 10 Americans report having never paid a news organization directly for news.**

Seventy-two percent of Americans report having never paid a news organization directly for news — including subscriptions, donations or buying magazines. Among those who have paid for news, paying via subscription is most common, followed by donations or memberships. Thus, the 26% of Americans who have paid for news are most likely doing so through an ongoing subscription rather than a one-time payment.

*“I think that maybe when they start out or when they want to become a journalist, they’re interested in actually discovering the truth or finding relevant information about events. But ... even if they once initially were focused on the truth, people don’t really care to visit those articles or pay for that ... then they’re going to be forced to shift their mindsets and mainly focus more on just drawing people in, whether that’s through click bait or salacious articles.”*

— FOCUS GROUP  
PARTICIPANT, AGED 18-35

It is important to note that these measures do not account for the conditions in which news is a part of the payment for other services. Most obviously, subscriptions to cable television, streaming television and internet services often include access to news content. These findings may suggest that most Americans would not pay beyond the cost of basic telecommunication services to access news content.

FIGURE 7

## Percentage of Americans Who Have Paid Directly for News and Methods of Payment Used

Have you ever donated money to a news organization or paid to access news, such as paying for a subscription or article, or buying a news magazine?

■ % Yes ■ % No



There are a variety of ways people pay to access news. Which of the following payment methods have you ever used to access the news?

(% Among those who have donated to a news organization or paid to access news)

■ % Yes ■ % No



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

## Only three in 10 Americans who get most of their news online report having paid for news directly in the past.

U.S. adults who report getting most of their news from a printed newspaper or magazine are the most likely to have paid directly for news (50%). Radio news followers are also slightly more likely to have paid for news, at 35%, followed by online news consumers, at 30%. By contrast, television news consumers are the least likely to have paid for news<sup>8</sup>: 16% say they have paid directly for it; 81% report that they have not.

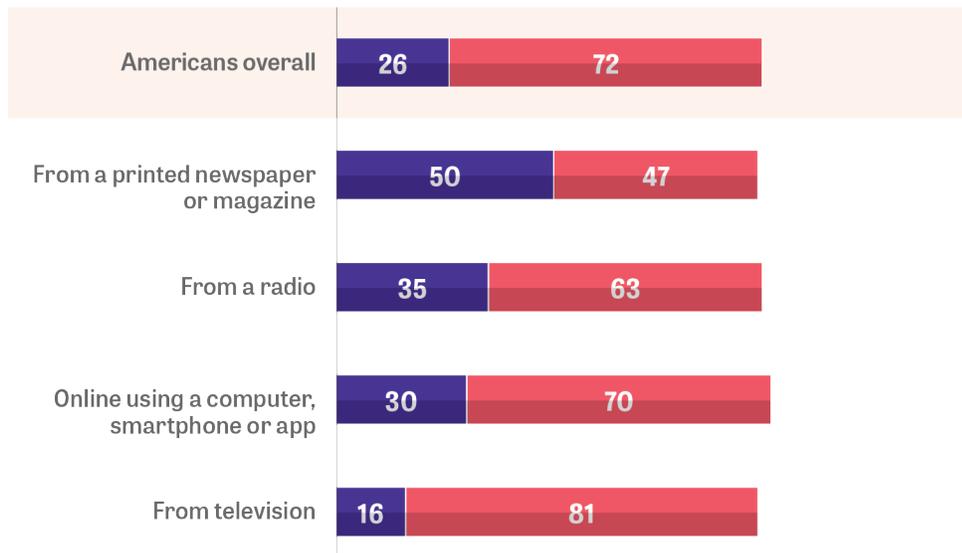
FIGURE 8

### Percentage of Americans Who Have Paid Directly for News, by Primary News Platform

Have you ever donated money to a news organization or paid to access news, such as paying for a subscription or article, or buying a news magazine?

In which format do you get most of your news?

■ % Yes ■ % No



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

<sup>8</sup> Many television news consumers are already indirectly paying for news via the cost of internet, cable or streaming television services. The 81% of television news consumers who report “no” are likely reporting on any additional and direct payments to access news content above and beyond basic subscriptions.

**Although younger adults generally consume less news than older adults, they are more likely to have directly paid for it.**

When asked how much attention they pay to local, national and international news, more Americans aged 58 and older say they pay “a great deal of attention” compared with the national average. Americans younger than 58 — encompassing adults in Gen Z through Gen X — report paying less attention to all forms of news compared with the national average. However, millennials and Gen X Americans are more likely than older generations to report having paid directly for news at some point in their life.

FIGURE 9A

**How Much Attention Americans Are Paying to News, by Age Group**

How much attention are you currently paying to each of the following?

(Percentage paying “a great deal of attention”)

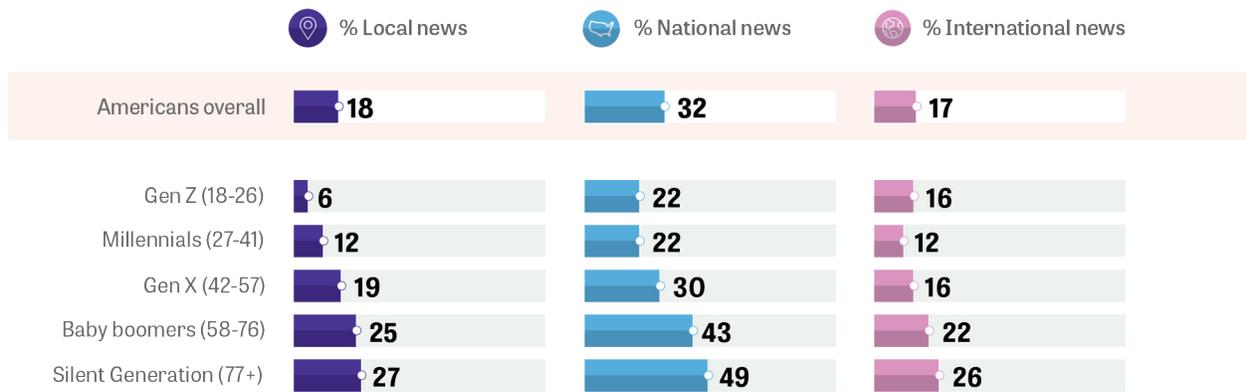
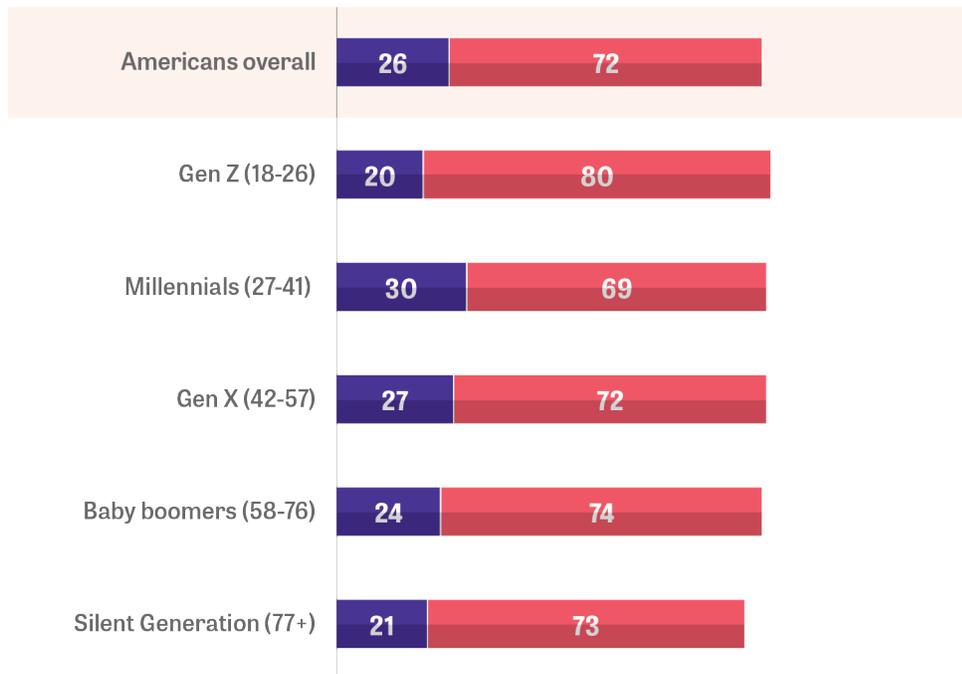


FIGURE 9B

## Who Has Paid Directly For News, by Age Group

Have you ever donated money to a news organization or paid to access news, such as paying for a subscription or article, or buying a news magazine?

■ % Yes ■ % No



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

These results align with a recent study from the American Press Institute's Media Insight Project that focused on the news habits of Gen Z and millennials.<sup>9</sup> The results showed that the youngest generations of Americans are more likely to pay for movie and television streaming services that are likely to include access to some form of news content (57%) than to pay for news directly (28%). They also channel their spending power toward video or audio content from independent creators/influencers on YouTube or podcasts (31%), and 26% say they pay for cable television.

<sup>9</sup> *Fatigue, traditionalism, and engagement: News habits and attitudes of the Gen Z and millennial generations.* (2022, August). AP-NORC. <https://apnorc.org/projects/fatigue-traditionalism-and-engagement-news-habits-and-attitudes-of-the-gen-z-and-millennial-generations/>

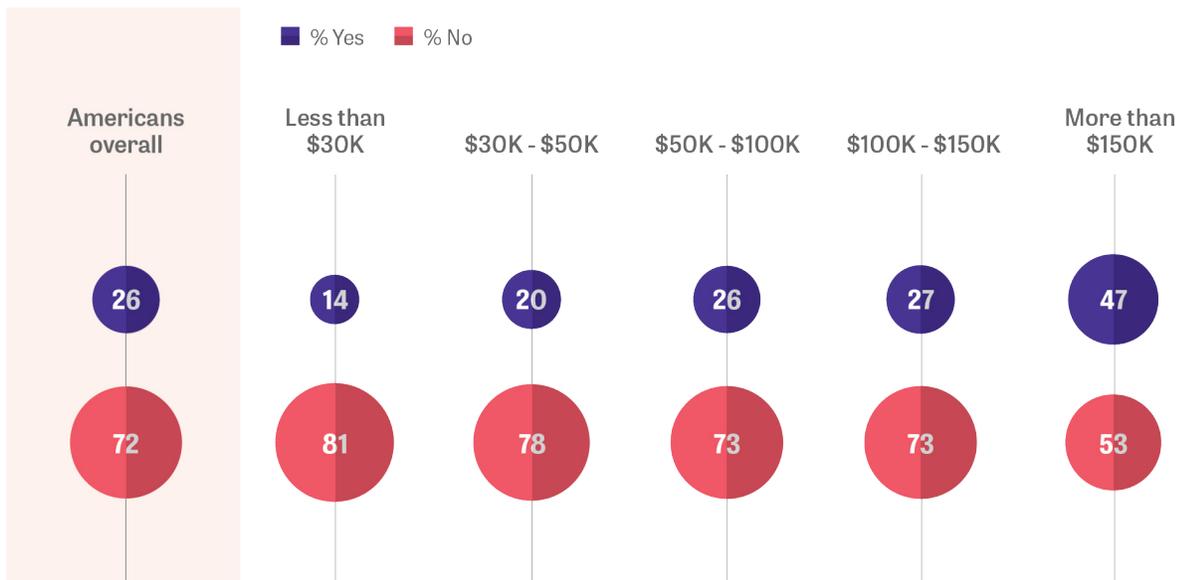
**Adults with higher levels of income and education, Democrats, and White Americans are also more likely to have paid directly for news.**

Beyond generational differences in who has paid for news, the percentage of Americans who report having paid directly for news increases significantly with income levels. The highest earners — those making more than \$150K per year — are 21 percentage points more likely to report having paid for news than the national average.

FIGURE 10

**Percentage of Americans Who Have Paid Directly for News, by Income Level**

Have you ever donated money to a news organization or paid to access news, such as paying for a subscription or article, or buying a news magazine?



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

Among those who have paid directly for news, those with a household income over \$100K are nearly twice as likely to report having paid via membership (41%-42%) as those earning less than \$50K (23%), and nine in 10 report having paid via subscription.

Further differences in who has paid directly for news in the past exist by partisanship, race and educational attainment:

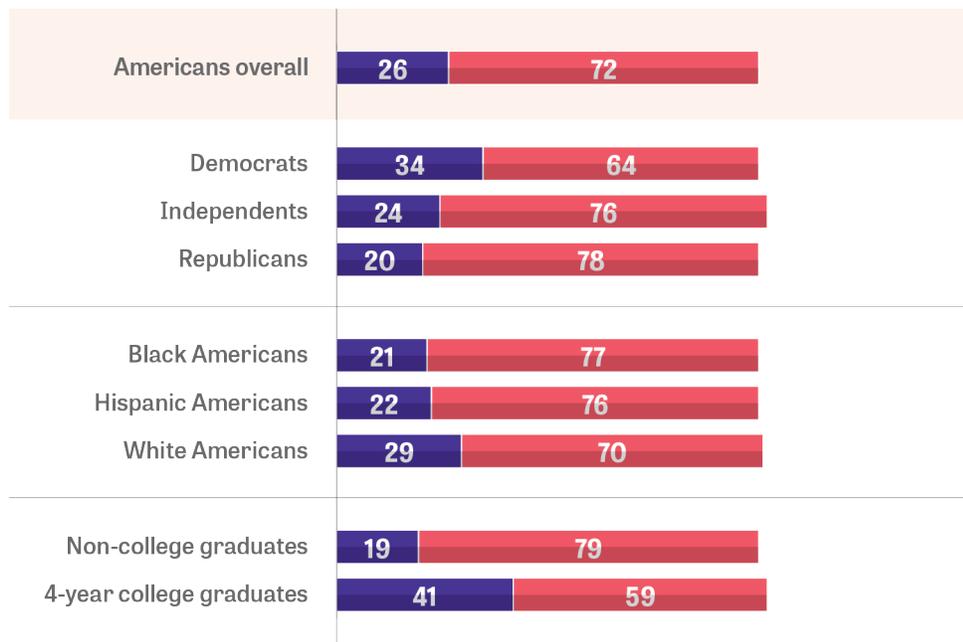
- Democrats are more likely than Republicans and independents to have paid for news. Among partisans who have paid for news in the past, Democrats are more than twice as likely as Republicans to have donated to a news organization (49% vs. 21%, respectively).
- Regardless of political partisanship or income,<sup>10</sup> White Americans are more likely to have paid for news.
- Four in 10 Americans with at least a four-year college degree report having paid for news — 15 percentage points higher than the national average and more than twice the percentage of non-college graduates. Those with a college education are also 21 percentage points more likely to say they would be willing to pay for news in the future.

FIGURE 11

## Percentage of Americans Who Have Paid Directly for News, by Political Party, Race and Educational Attainment

Have you ever donated money to a news organization or paid to access news, such as paying for a subscription or article, or buying a news magazine?

■ % Yes ■ % No



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

<sup>10</sup> The results from a logistic regression model that includes a variety of demographic variables, such as age, gender, income, education, race, political identity and urbanicity, show that the correlation between education and racial identity and paying for news/willingness to pay in the future is statistically significant while controlling for other variables.

**Only 17% of Americans say they would pay to access news in the future.**

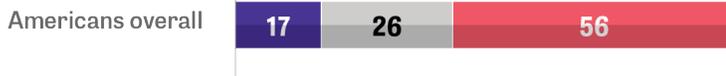
More than half of U.S. adults surveyed say they would not pay to access news in the future. While only 17% say they would pay for news, about a quarter of respondents say they “don’t know.”

FIGURE 12

**Percentage of Americans Who Would Pay for News in the Future**

Would you pay to access news in the future?

■ % Yes   ■ % Don't know   ■ % No



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

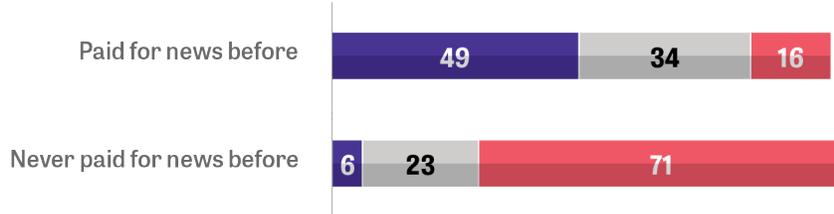
Americans who have paid for news in the past are much more likely to say they would pay for news in the future than those who have never paid.

FIGURE 13

**Percentage of Americans Who Would Pay for News in the Future, by Whether They Have Paid for News in the Past**

Would you pay to access news in the future?

■ % Yes   ■ % Don't know   ■ % No



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

When examining results by demographic factors, this study finds that the youngest Americans — those under the age of 40 — are more open to paying for news in the future than their older counterparts. Democrats are about twice as likely to say they would pay for news in the future as Republicans and independents, and those with a four-year college degree are three times as likely to be willing to pay in the future as those with less education.

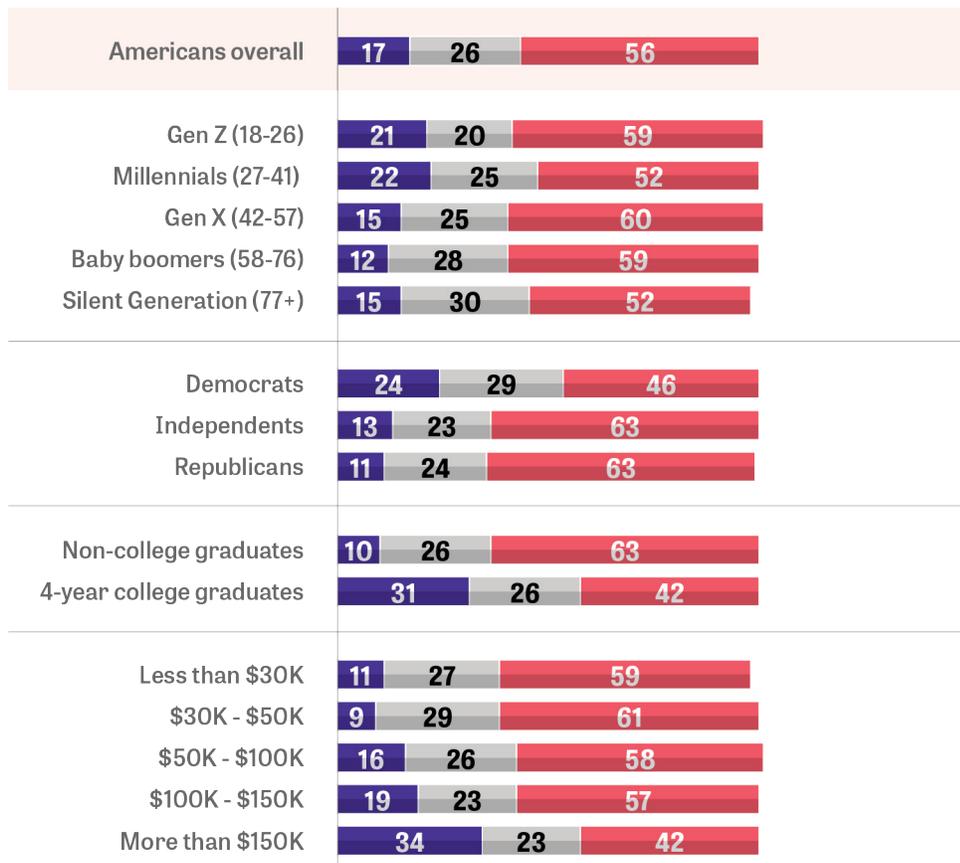
Income matters as well. Thirty-four percent of those earning more than \$150K in annual household income are willing to pay in the future. This percentage decreases significantly, to 19%, among those earning \$100K-\$150K, 16% of those earning \$50K-\$100K, and 20% of those earning less than \$50K.

FIGURE 14

### Percentage of Americans Who Would Pay for News in the Future, by Age Group, Political Party, Educational Attainment and Income Level

Would you pay to access news in the future?

■ % Yes   ■ % Don't know   ■ % No



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

**Americans with more favorable opinions of the news media are more likely to have paid and be willing to pay for news in the future.**

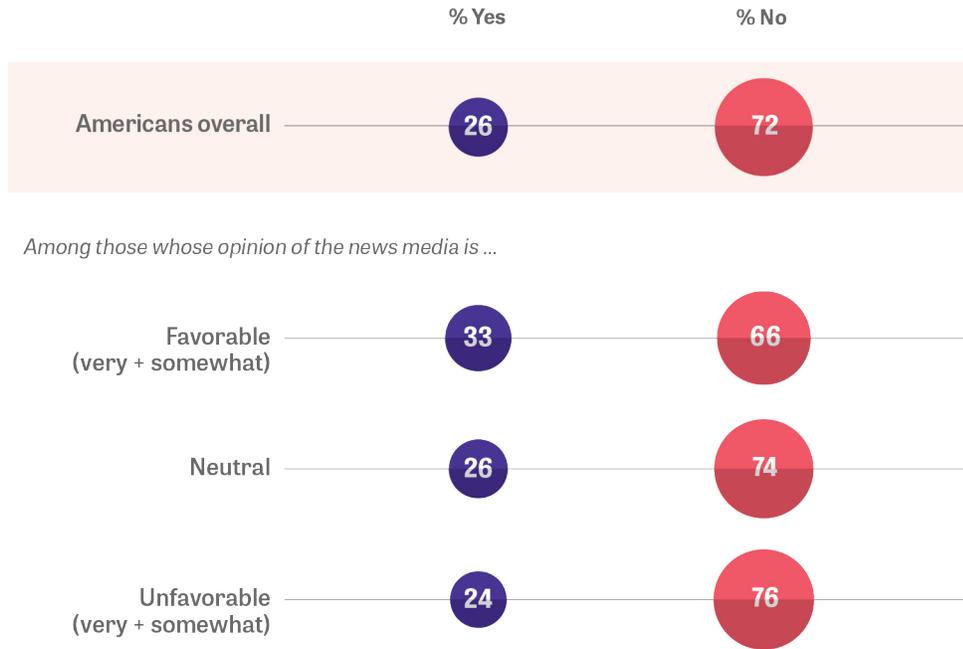
About one in three Americans who hold “very” or “somewhat” favorable attitudes about the U.S. news media report having paid for news in some form. This group is also more likely than those with less favorable attitudes to be willing to pay to access news in the future by more than 10 percentage points. Those with neutral or unfavorable attitudes toward the media are less likely to report having paid or being willing to pay. Thus, public sentiment about the news generally appears to have the potential to affect news organizations’ bottom lines.

FIGURE 15

**Percentage of Americans Who Have Paid Directly for News, by Attitudes About the News Media**

Have you ever donated money to a news organization or paid to access news, such as paying for a subscription or article, or buying a news magazine?

What is your overall opinion of the news media in the United States today?



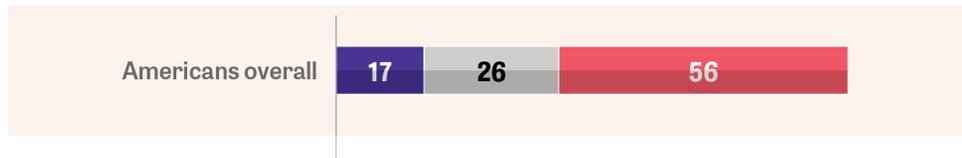
Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

FIGURE 16

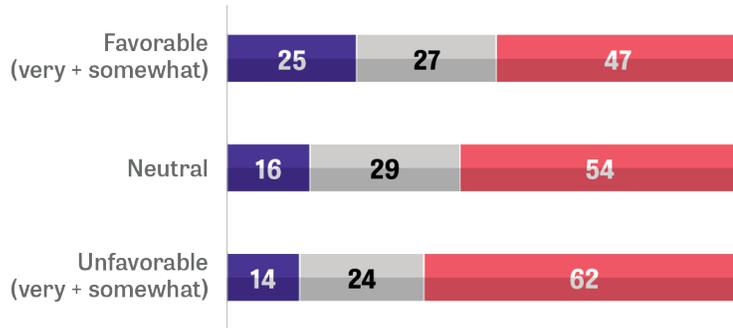
## Percentage of Americans Who Would Pay for News in the Future, by Attitudes About the News Media

Would you pay to access news in the future?

■ % Yes ■ % Don't know ■ % No



Among those whose opinion of the news media is ...



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

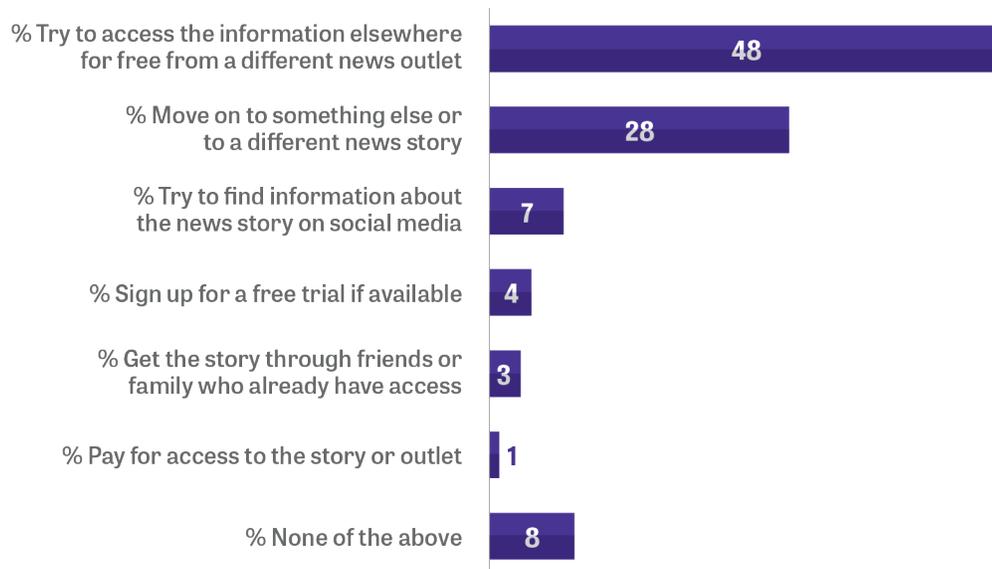
## Most Americans try to find a free source or abandon information altogether instead of paying for it when they encounter a paywall.

When faced with having to pay to keep reading or watching a news story online, most Americans will try to access the same content for free elsewhere (48%) or move on to something else or a different news story (28%).

FIGURE 17

### Responses to Encountering a Paywall When Trying to Access News

Suppose you were trying to access a news story online and had to pay to keep reading or watching it, which ONE of the following would you be most likely to do?



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

Only 7% of respondents report that they would turn to social media for information about the content, but this percentage varies slightly by age. About twice as many people in Gen Z say they try to find information about the news story on social media if faced with a paywall (10%) as baby boomers (6%) or the Silent Generation (5%).

FIGURE 18

## Responses to Encountering a Paywall When Trying to Access News, by Age Group

Suppose you were trying to access a news story online and had to pay to keep reading or watching it, which ONE of the following would you be most likely to do?

	Americans overall	Gen Z (18-26)	Millennials (27-41)	Gen X (42-57)	Baby boomers (58-76)	Silent Generation (77+)
% Try to access the information elsewhere for free from a different news outlet	48	52	50	46	45	46
% Move on to something else or to a different news story	28	21	27	33	29	20
% Try to find information about the news story on social media	7	10	8	7	6	5

Note: Select response items with differences by generational age groups shown.

**BROUGHT  
TO YOU BY ...**



### **3 Americans' Preferences for News Revenue**

Although most Americans report never having paid for news directly nor being willing to in the future, there are a variety of opinions among the public on how news organizations should be funded. Overall, most Americans support advertising-based funding to ensure news is free and accessible to everyone. There is less outright support for government funding and donations, but many are willing to consider these forms of funding depending on other factors, such as who is donating and which organizations receive the money. Young people express more openness to different means of funding news — including news organizations offering expanded services like events and newsletters — than older generations.

#### **Americans are most supportive of news organizations making money through advertising.**

Gallup/Knight asked U.S. adults to evaluate which revenue sources were most reasonable for the American press to rely on.<sup>11</sup> More Americans are open to news organizations making money through advertising than through donations, government funds or individuals paying directly for news. Three in 10 say it is “always” reasonable for news organizations to make money through advertising on their channels, print editions and websites; an additional 62% say it “depends.”

<sup>11</sup> Again, this sentiment is likely for any cost above and beyond access to news via paying for basic telecommunications services like the internet and cable television.

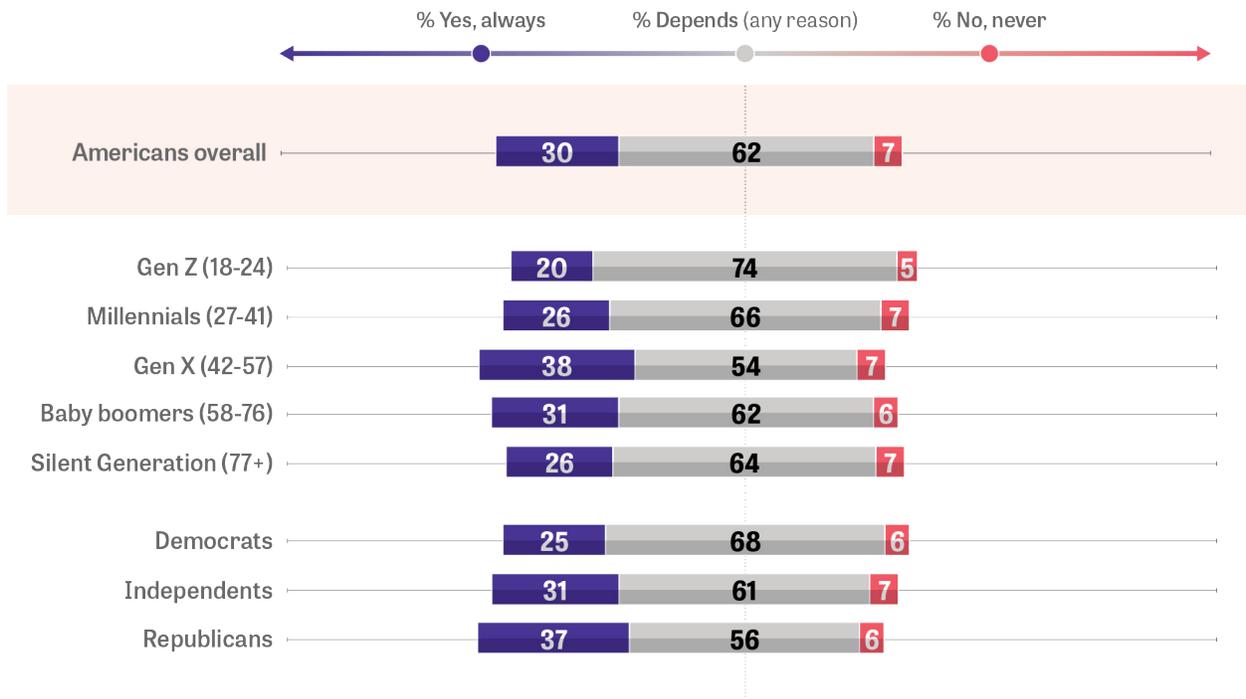
Nonetheless, not all Americans are as approving of news organizations using advertising to make money. The youngest cohort, Gen Z, expresses the lowest levels of support, with support rising until it peaks at the middle-aged Gen X before falling again among the Silent Generation.

Republicans (37%) are substantially more likely to say it is always reasonable for news organizations to make money through advertising than Democrats (25%). Independents fall in between the two parties.

FIGURE 19

## Views on News Organizations Making Money Through Advertising, by Age Group and Political Party

Do you think it's reasonable for news organizations to make money through advertising on their channels, print editions and websites?\*



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

\* Respondents who selected a definitive response option —“yes, always” or “no, never” — were not permitted any additional responses. However, individuals who did not provide either response were allowed to select more than one of the conditional (or “depends on ...”) as desired.

## The content of advertisements matters most among those who say it “depends” when considering whether advertising should fund news.

Among the 62% of Americans who say it “depends” when asked if it is reasonable for news organizations to make money through advertising, 70% say it depends on “what is being advertised.” Forty-four percent say it depends on the “quantity and length of the advertisements,” and 40% say the person or organization advertising is a deciding factor. Thirty-seven percent cite more than one of these reasons.

Generationally, younger adults are more likely to say news organizations’ ability to raise money through advertising should be contingent on what is being advertised than baby boomers and the Silent Generation.

Three-fourths of Democrats (75%) say it depends on what is being advertised, a somewhat higher percentage than independents (70%) and Republicans (65%). Democrats and independents are also much more likely than Republicans to say it depends on the person or organization advertising.

FIGURE 20

### Factors Influencing Views on News Organizations Making Money Through Advertising, by Age Group and Political Party

Do you think it’s reasonable for news organizations to make money through advertising on their channels, print editions and websites?

(% Among all respondents who say it “depends”)

	% Depends on what is being advertised	% Depends on quantity and length of advertisements	% Depends on the person or organization advertising
Americans overall	70	44	40
Gen Z (18-26)	72	53	43
Millennials (27-41)	77	47	49
Gen X (42-57)	71	37	37
Baby boomers (58-76)	64	40	32
Silent Generation (77+)	58	49	30
Democrats	65	41	33
Independents	75	45	41
Republicans	70	45	43

Note: Percentages will exceed 100% as respondents were allowed to select more than one option.

**Donations to news organizations are also palatable for many Americans, contingent on who gives.**

Overall, about a quarter of U.S. adults (24%) say donations should “always” be used to ensure news is available for everyone free of charge — nearly equal to the 21% who say donations should “never” be used. But more than half of U.S. adults surveyed report some openness to donations to news organizations — depending on the content, amount and source of the funding.

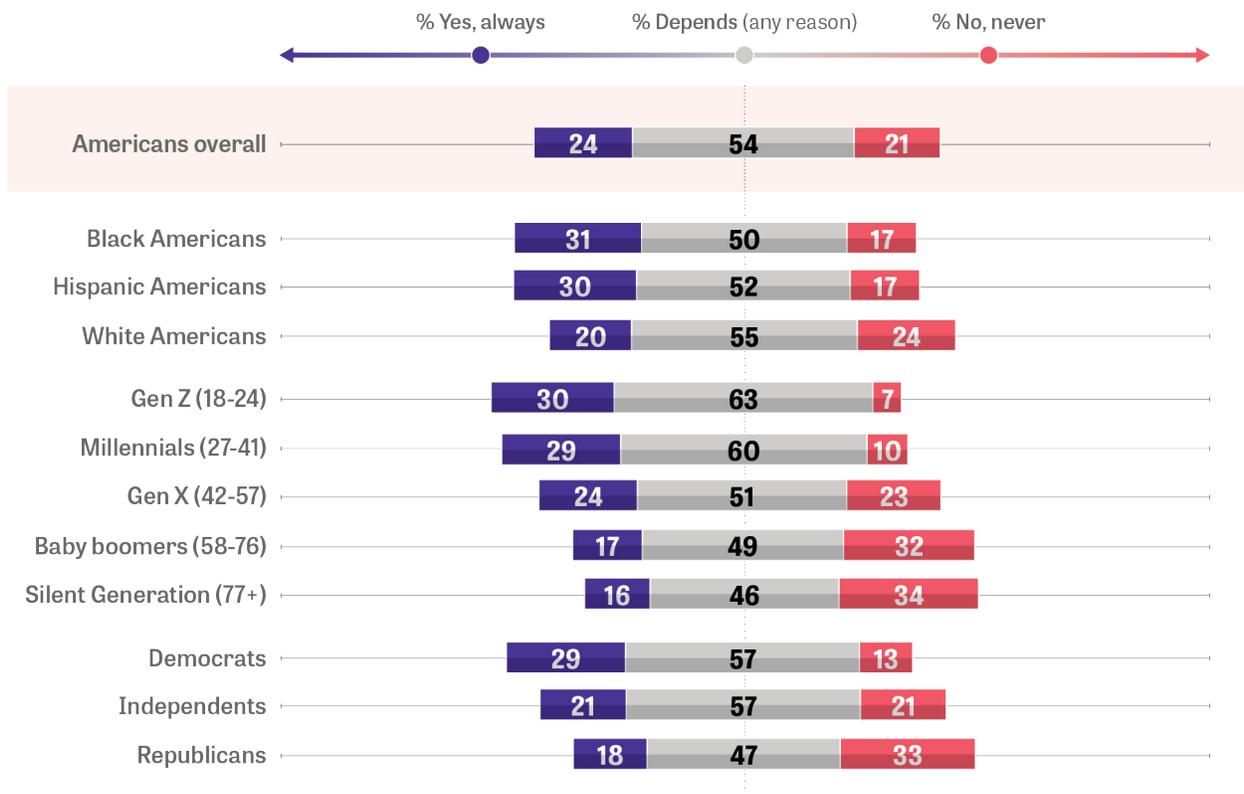
Fewer than a third of adults across different demographic groups say donations should always be used to ensure everyone can freely access news. Black, Hispanic and younger Americans (under age 41) are slightly more likely than others to support news funding via donations.

Partisans are a bit at odds regarding donations as well. Democrats are more likely than Republicans — by more than 10 percentage points — to say donations should always be used for funding news, while Republicans are more than 20 points more likely than Democrats to say donations should never be used. Independents fall almost exactly in between.

FIGURE 21

**Views on Using Donations to Ensure Free Access to News, by Race, Age Group and Political Party**

Do you think donations should be used to ensure news is available for everyone free of charge?\*



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

\* Respondents who selected a definitive response option —“yes, always” or “no, never” — were not permitted any additional responses. However, individuals who did not provide either response were allowed to select more than one of the conditional (or “depends on ...”) as desired.

Among the 54% of Americans who say it “depends” when considering donations as a means of ensuring free access to news, there is a broad consensus that “who the donations are coming from” is an important deciding factor — including among adults across political party affiliations.

FIGURE 22

### Factors Influencing Views on Using Donations to Ensure Free Access to News, by Political Party

Do you think donations should be used to ensure news is available for everyone free of charge?

(% Among all respondents who say it “depends”)

	Americans overall	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
% Depends on who the donations are coming from	62	61	66	60
% Depends on the content	46	47	45	43
% Depends on which news organizations receive the donations	38	44	36	32
% Depends on the amount of the donation	24	26	26	20

Note: Percentages will exceed 100% as respondents were allowed to select more than one option.

**More than half of U.S. adults are open to government funding being used to ensure news is free for everyone — under certain conditions.**

About one in five Americans (22%) say government funding should “always” be used to ensure news is available to everyone free of charge. Another 33% say it “depends.” Forty-four percent are unequivocally against using government funds to ensure free access to news. And while more Republicans than Democrats or independents say “no, never,” the sentiment is not driven by those on the right alone.<sup>12</sup> Overall, Democrats, women, Black Americans and millennials are the most supportive of government funding of the news.

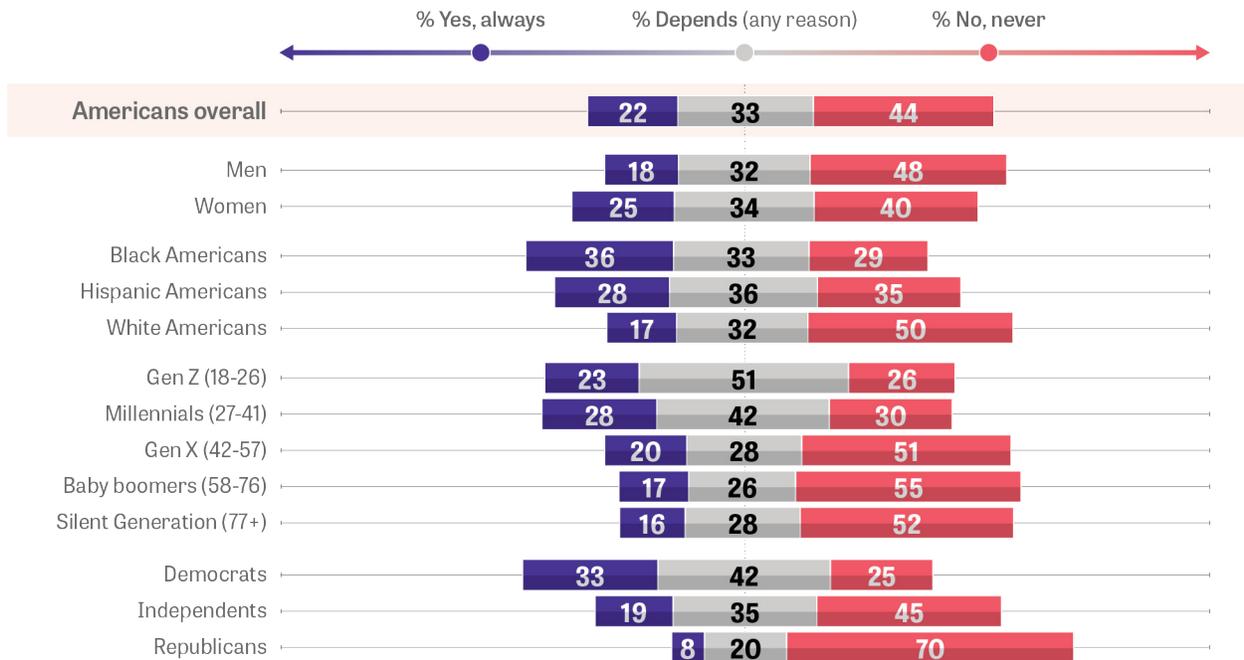
*“When I was younger, it was news. It was factual. They said, ‘We’ve found this, and we did research, and this is what we got,’ and so you believed that. Now it’s, ‘we think,’ ‘we heard,’ ‘there was a rumor,’ and so on. It’s not factual. You’re looking at it, and you’re like, ‘What do I believe? Who do I believe?’ It doesn’t seem real anymore. Because a lot of these news services are acting like they have a TV show and not a news service, and they’re going for spectacular ratings.”*

— FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, 56+

FIGURE 23

**Views on Using Government Funding to Ensure Free Access to News, by Gender, Race, Age Group and Political Party**

Do you think government funding should be used to ensure news is available for everyone free of charge?\*



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

\* Respondents who selected a definitive response option — “yes, always” or “no, never” — were not permitted any additional responses. However, individuals who did not provide either response were allowed to select more than one of the conditional (or “depends on ...”) as desired.

12 Among the 44% of Americans who reported “no, never,” 42% identify as Republican, 22% identify as Democrat, 29% identify as independent, and 5% report “other” when asked which political party they most closely affiliate.

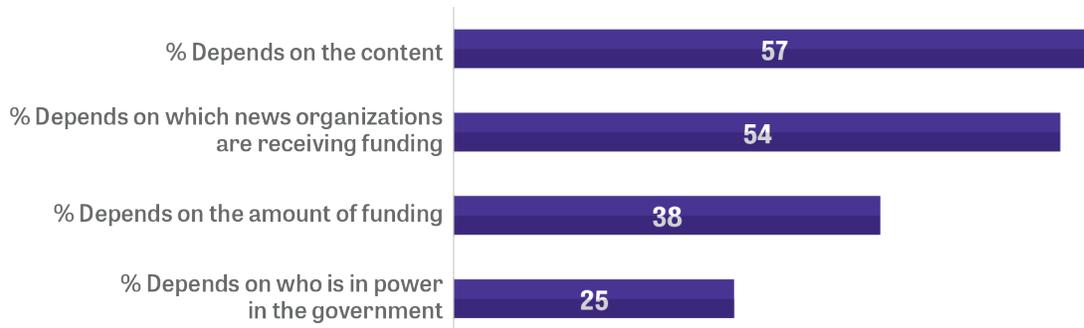
Most of the 33% who say it "depends" are split between it depending on the content of the news (57%) and which news organizations are receiving funding (54%). Only a quarter of these Americans say it depends on "who is in power in the government." These attitudes hold relatively consistent across demographic and political party groups.

FIGURE 24

## Factors Influencing Views on Using Government Funding to Ensure Free Access to News

Do you think government funding should be used to ensure news is available for everyone free of charge?

(% Among all respondents who say it "depends")



Note: Percentages will exceed 100% as respondents were allowed to select more than one option.

**Nearly half of U.S. adults say it is “never” reasonable for individuals to have to pay for the news they watch or read.**

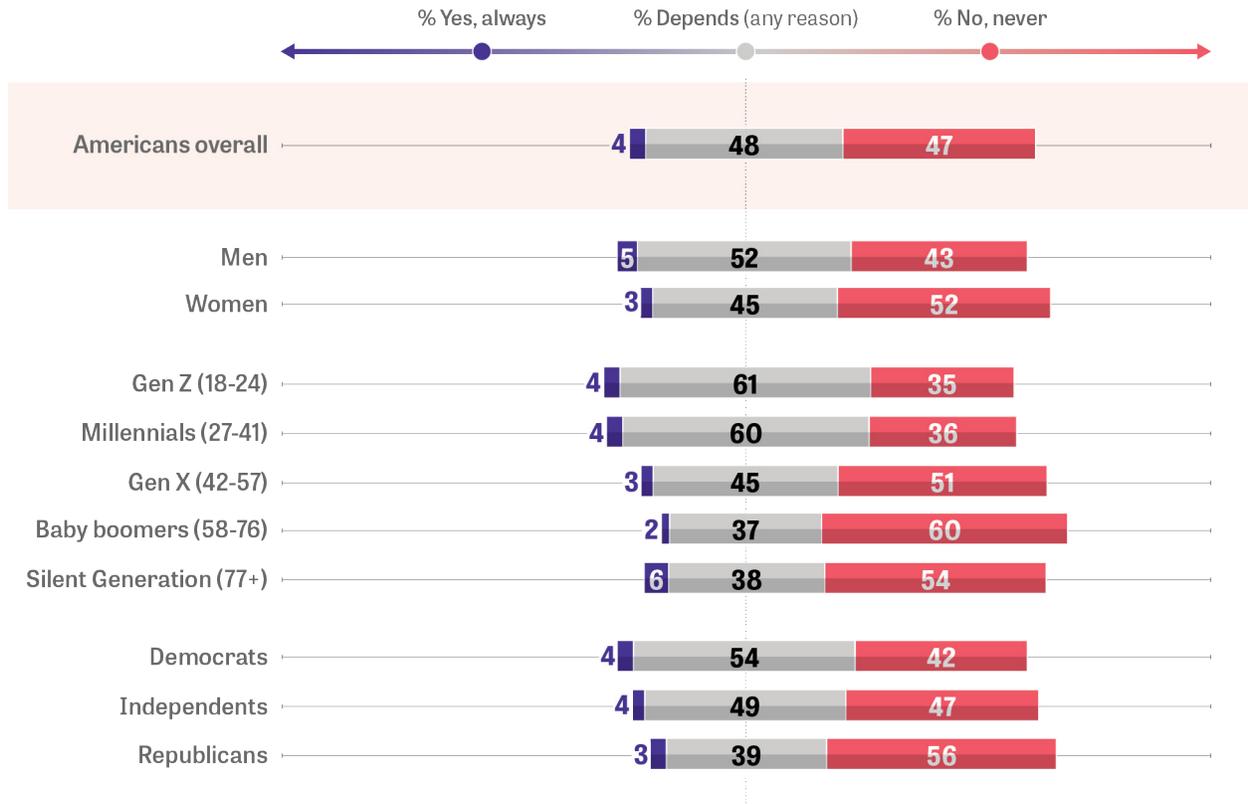
Forty-seven percent of Americans say it is “never” reasonable for individuals to have to pay directly for the news they watch or read. Nearly equally as many say it “depends” (48%), with the two most important factors depending on the content or the cost.

Women, older Americans, people of color and Republicans are all slightly more likely to believe it is never reasonable for individuals to have to pay for the news they watch or read. Younger Americans are more likely to say it depends than older adults — of whom over 50% or more say “no, never.”

FIGURE 25

**Views on Whether Americans Should Pay for News, by Gender, Age Group and Political Party**

Do you think it's reasonable for individuals to have to pay for the news they watch or read?  
 (Please mark all that apply)\*



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

\* Respondents who selected a definitive response option —“yes, always” or “no, never” — were not permitted any additional responses. However, individuals who did not provide either response were allowed to select more than one of the conditional (or “depends on ...”) as desired.

**It is not just the cost preventing Americans from paying directly for news: For younger Americans in particular, content matters.**

Among the nearly one-half of Americans who say it “depends” when asked if individuals should have to pay for the news they watch or read, 76% say their decision would depend on the content. A slightly fewer 62% report that the determining factor is the cost.

It is important to note that these groups are not mutually exclusive, and there is significant overlap. Nearly four in 10 (37%) say it would depend on the content and the cost when considering whether individuals should have to pay for the news they watch or read.

Younger Americans — who have grown up or spent a considerable portion of their lives in the digital media era where, according to the famous dictum, “content is king”<sup>13</sup> — are considerably more likely than their older counterparts to say content is the decisive factor in whether people should pay for the news they consume.

FIGURE 26

**Factors Influencing Views on Whether Americans Should Pay for News, by Age Group**

**Do you think it’s reasonable for individuals to have to pay for the news they watch or read?**

(% Among all respondents who say it “depends”)

	% Depends on the content	% Depends on the cost
<b>Americans overall</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>62</b>
Gen Z (18-26)	84	64
Millennials (27-41)	84	62
Gen X (42-57)	72	59
Baby boomers (58-76)	63	63
Silent Generation (77+)	64	65

Note: Percentages will exceed 100% as respondents were allowed to select more than one option.

<sup>13</sup> Shaw, D. L., Vargo, C. J., Graham, G., & Greenhill, A. (2015). Content is king: Strategies for shaping media organizations. In G. Graham, A. Greenhill, D. Shaw, & C. J. Vargo (Authors), *Content is king: News media management in the digital age* (pp. 3-14). Bloomsbury Academic. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781501312731.0005>

**Overall, advertising wins out as Americans' preferred largest source of funding for news.**

Fifty-two percent of U.S. adults say news organizations' largest source of funding should be from advertising, followed by 23% who cite "all of these evenly" — i.e., individuals paying directly for news, government backing, donations and advertising. Only 9% of Americans say government funds or paying directly for news should be the largest source.

People of color, older Americans and Republicans are most likely to be resistant to paying directly for news. However, each of these groups holds different funding sources in higher regard.

- Older Americans and Republicans are more supportive of relying on advertising rather than donations or government funding, while younger Americans and Democrats show higher support for the multisource funding model.
- Black Americans express much higher support for donations and government funding for news than White Americans.
- Black Americans and Hispanic Americans are more likely than White Americans to say, "all of these evenly," while White Americans are more likely than Black and Hispanic Americans to say advertising should be the largest source of news funding.

FIGURE 27

**Views on How News Organizations Should Be Funded, by Race, Age Group and Political Party**

In general, which ONE of the following do you think should be the largest source of funding for news organizations?

	% Advertising	% Individuals paying for news directly	% Government funding	% Donations	% All of these evenly
<b>Americans overall</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>23</b>
Gen Z (18-26)	40	12	16	10	20
Millennials (27-41)	39	11	14	7	27
Gen X (42-57)	58	8	7	3	23
Baby boomers (58-76)	66	6	5	2	18
Silent Generation (77+)	57	8	7	2	22
Republicans	71	8	3	3	12
Democrats	42	8	13	5	31
Independents	52	10	10	5	20
White Americans	58	9	7	4	20
Black Americans	40	5	18	5	30
Hispanic Americans	44	9	12	5	27

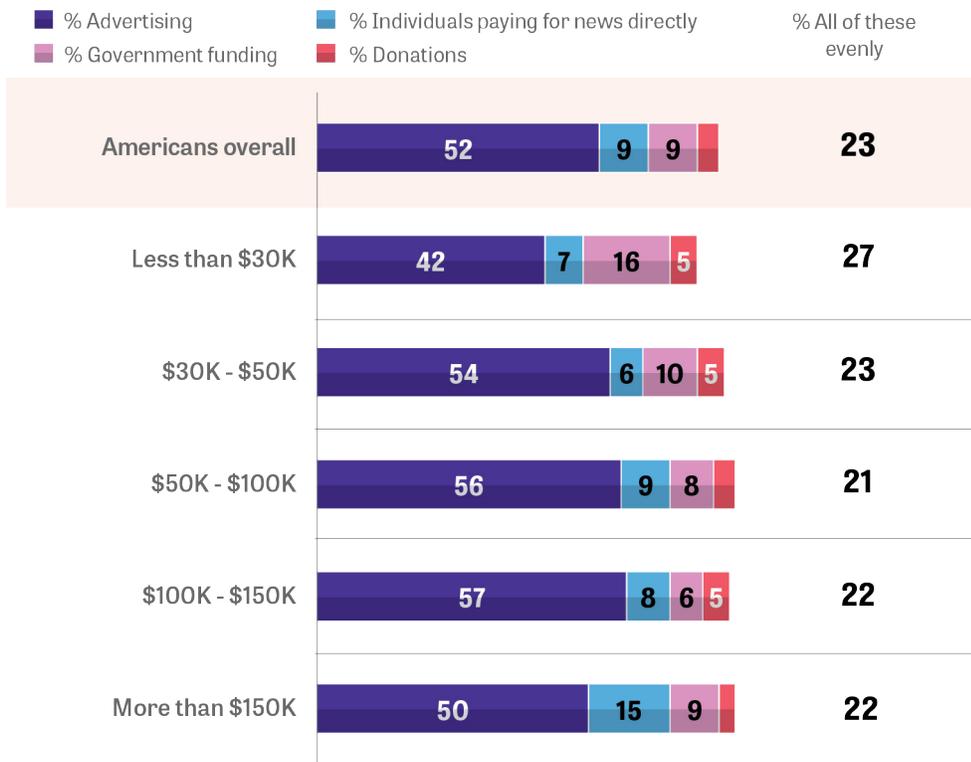
Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

Americans at the extreme ends of household income hold differing opinions about which one source should be greatest for funding news. Fifteen percent of those who earn more than \$150K per year believe the largest source of funding for news should come from individuals paying for it directly, compared with 6% to 9% of Americans of all other income levels. Sixteen percent of adults earning less than \$30K per year in household income say government funding should be the main source of news organizations' funding, compared with 6% to 10% of all other income levels. The lowest income earners are also slightly less likely to say advertising should be the largest source of funding. Interestingly, there are no statistically significant differences across income levels regarding "donations."

**FIGURE 28**

**Views on How News Organizations Should Be Funded, by Income Level**

In general, which ONE of the following do you think should be the largest source of funding for news organizations?



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%. Values under 5% are not displayed.

**Expanding information services may open the door to new revenue opportunities.**

Many traditional news organizations are embracing new and creative platforms for delivering information to the American public above and beyond reliance on their existing websites or TV channels. New organizations have emerged that focus more on nontraditional methods of news delivery, such as via newsletters or events.

Generally speaking, many Americans say it is not reasonable for news organizations to charge for special content or tiers of access to content. However, 35% say it is reasonable for news organizations to charge for in-person or online events, and 27% think charging for newsletters or direct email is reasonable. The strongest sentiment against additional charges concerns first access to news updates — 67% of Americans say it is not reasonable for news organizations to charge for this type of content.

However, 16% to 29% say it “depends” when assessing whether it is reasonable for news organizations to charge for different types of content. Notably, younger generations are more willing than older adults to say it is reasonable to charge for exclusive or special content, in-person or online events, and first access to news updates.

FIGURE 29

**Views on Whether News Organizations Should Be Able to Charge for Certain Content, by Age Group**

Do you think it’s reasonable for news organizations to charge people for any of the following types of news content?

■ % Yes ■ % Depends ■ % No



Note: No answer percentages not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

# Conclusion

There is a strong correlation between those who hold favorable opinions of the media and those who believe news organizations balance public service and financial interests well. And Americans with more favorable opinions of the news media are also more likely to have paid for news and consider doing so in the future. The tension between these roles is essential to understanding Americans' attitudes about the news and tangibly important in assessing their willingness to pay for it.

A majority of Americans support funding for news organizations being driven mostly by advertising rather than government subsidies, donations or direct payment from individuals. But relying on advertising alone has shown to not be a one-size-fits-all solution to sustaining news organizations. For example, there has been a growing decline of advertising for certain kinds of outlets (i.e., newspapers) and growth in advertising for others (e.g., cable news or other niche news producers).

That said, many believe government funding and donations could work as a means of ensuring news is free to everyone, depending on factors such as the content being funded and the source or recipient of the funding. There is also an indication that public attitudes about funding news could shift over time. Younger generations seem to be more open to diversified revenue streams such as news organizations charging for events, newsletters and special content. As younger generations continue to gain buying power, these attitudes could translate into real financial growth opportunities for news outlets.

However, optimism about funding news in the future does not resolve the challenges news producers face today. This study finds that most Americans are hesitant to use their wallets or tax dollars to directly fund the news. One path to better understanding why is to continue to explore how Americans evaluate the news.

Building off five years of [previous Gallup/Knight Foundation research](#) on Americans' opinions about the news, Part 2 of the *American Views 2022* study focuses on mapping the attitudes related to trust in news and Americans' assessment of today's media environment. Across these metrics, widespread negative sentiment about the news media and growing feelings of being overwhelmed by a crowded information market may continue to damage Americans' ability to rely on the news media as an essential partner in their civic and democratic life.

Part 1, *News in America: Public Good or Private Enterprise?* and Part 2, *Trust, Media and Democracy*, expand our considerations about how the news can survive — and thrive — in America. Continuing to examine the interaction between the financial pressures and civic duties of the U.S. news media will be critical to informing public policy and practical business strategies designed to ensure its stability and essential contribution to the health of our democracy.

# Methodology

Results are based on a Gallup Panel™ web and mail study conducted between May 31 and July 21, 2022. The Gallup Panel is not an opt-in panel; it is a probability-based panel of U.S. adults whom Gallup randomly selects using address-based sampling methods or dual-frame random-digit-dial phone interviews. The survey was completed by 5,593 American adults aged 18 and older. The AAPOR5 response rate was 38%. Gallup weighted the obtained sample to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse.

Nonresponse adjustments were made by adjusting the sample to match the national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets were based on the 2019 Current Population Survey figures for the aged-18-and-older U.S. population. For results based on this sample of U.S. adults, the margin of sampling error is  $\pm 1.5$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher. All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

The full questionnaire, topline results, detailed cross tabulations and raw data may be obtained upon request. For questions about how the survey was conducted, please contact [galluphelp@gallup.com](mailto:galluphelp@gallup.com).

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# About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation



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