

PARTISANSHIP AND THE MEDIA: HOW PERSONAL POLITICS AFFECT WHERE PEOPLE GO, WHAT THEY TRUST, AND WHETHER THEY PAY

New research shows that although Americans are in many ways divided in their attitudes toward the media, Republicans and Democrats are in many ways strikingly alike in their behavior toward the news.

They are equally likely to pay for news, to get news from social media, to seek it out actively rather than passively, and to get news multiple times a day, according to two recent studies by the Media Insight Project, a collaboration of the American Press Institute and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Republicans and Democrats are also about equally likely to cite a local news source when asked about the news media they use most often and are equally likely to follow news about their towns and neighborhoods.

In general, it is independents who stand out from partisans of either stripe, particularly for being less likely to follow news closely or engage in other ways with the news.

But putting behavior aside, there are striking and potentially challenging differences among people of different party identifications when it comes to attitudes toward the news. There are also differences in the specific sources Democrats versus Republicans rely on for their information once you move beyond local news.

In general, Republicans and independents are less satisfied than Democrats—even with the news sources for which they pay and that they use most often.

Democrats, for instance, are more likely than Republicans or independents to say both the sources they use for free and the sources they pay for are reliable. Democrats are also more likely than Republicans or independents to say their paid source is a good value.

These partisan differences also exist among just newspaper subscribers. Democrats who subscribe to newspapers are more likely than Republican subscribers to say their newspaper is reliable and to believe it is a good value.



© 2016 iStock/Rawpixel Ltd

Democrats and Republicans follow news in similar ways.

	Percent of Democrats	Percent of Independents	Percent of Republicans
Get news multiple times a day	72	61	71
Actively seek out news	68	57	65
Get news on social media	75	74	75
Pay for news	58	48	56
Regularly use a local news source	25	20	21

However, partisans hold different attitudes about the media and follow different news outlets.

	Percent of Democrats	Percent of Independents	Percent of Republicans
Get news from Fox News	7	16	40
Get news from CNN	30	20	18
Media keeps them very well informed on important issues	38	14	20
News from media is very accurate	31	9	8
News organizations prevent political leaders from doing their job	17	31	59
Consider source they pay for as very or extremely reliable	73	56	53

This research comes from two recent Media Insight Project surveys. The first, a study about subscribing to news, interviewed 2,199 American adults from February 16 through March 20, 2017.¹ The second is a study of people's trust in news from the media in general versus their trust in the news they use most often, which is based on interviews with 2,036 American adults from March 8 through March 27, 2017. This latter study employed an experiment where half of the respondents were asked questions about "the news media" generally, while the other half were asked the same questions about "the news media you use most often."² Both surveys used AmeriSpeak®, NORC's probability-based panel.

Among the findings from the studies:

- Democrats are more likely than Republicans and independents to trust information from the media a lot (30 percent, 8 percent, and 12 percent).
- Among those who pay for news, 73 percent of Democrats say their paid source is very or extremely reliable versus 56 percent of independents and 53 percent of Republicans.
- There are few differences when it comes to technology use among Democrats, Republicans, and independents. They are about equally likely to get news from cell phones (86 percent, 84 percent, and 85 percent) and computers (66 percent, 65 percent, and 63 percent), while independents are a little less likely to get news from televisions (84 percent, 85 percent, and 78 percent).
- Democrats and Republicans follow different news topics at strikingly similar rates. They are equally likely to follow news about national politics (61 percent vs. 64 percent), local politics (15 percent vs. 13 percent), and their town or neighborhood (16 percent vs. 19 percent).

¹ <http://mediainsight.org/Pages/Paying-for-News-Why-People-Subscribe-and-What-It-Says-About-the-Future-of-Journalism.aspx>

² <http://mediainsight.org/Pages/%E2%80%9CMy%E2%80%9D-Media-Versus-%E2%80%9CThe%E2%80%9D-Media-Trust-in-News-Depends-on-Which-News-Media-You-Mean.aspx>

- Independents are less likely than Democrats and Republicans to watch, read, hear, or see news at least several times a day (61 percent vs. 72 percent and 71 percent).
- Democrats who pay for news are more likely than Republicans who pay to say the source they subscribe to is a very good value (45 percent vs. 30 percent).

The numbers suggest that Republicans and independents are engaging with the news and paying for it much like Democrats, but at the same time they are less satisfied by the news media, even the media they rely on most.

These differences in attitudes are significant even when controlling for other demographic and social factors like age, race, gender, income, and education.

The results also highlight challenges facing the news industry as it tries to build trust and reader revenue with more conservative audiences. For example, only about 4 in 10 Republicans and independents believe the news media they use often are willing to admit their mistakes. About 2 in 10 Republicans and independents mention lack of trust as one of the reasons they do not pay for news.

Similarly, Republicans and independents are less likely to say they would start to pay for a source they rely on now but get for free. All of these seem like potential obstacles for publishers who increasingly need to gain subscribers of all political affiliations to subsidize journalism.

PARTISANSHIP AND NEWS BEHAVIOR

DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS INTERACT WITH NEWS IN SIMILAR WAYS. INDEPENDENTS ARE LESS NEWSY.

At a time when there seems a growing ideological divide in the news sources people turn to and in politics generally, is this divide impacting how people use news and who pays for news?

Overall, there aren't stark differences between people who identify themselves as Democrats versus Republicans in their basic approach to or appetite for news. The bigger differences come between people who identify with one of the two major political parties and those who consider themselves independents or nonpartisans.

For example, Democrats and Republicans keep up with news more often than independents; 72 percent of Democrats and 71 percent of Republicans saying they watch, read, hear, or see news at least several times a day. By comparison, 61 percent of independents say the same.

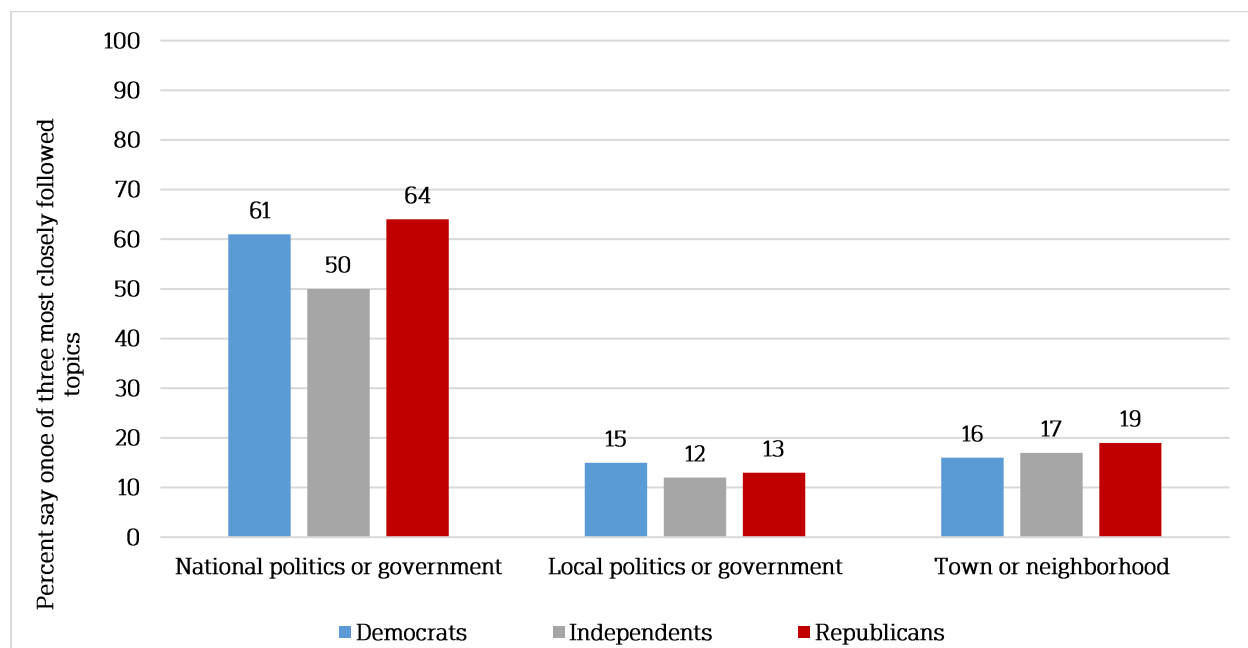
The research also asks people whether on balance they are more inclined to actively seek out news or whether they are more inclined to bump into it—in effect, to let it find them. Here again, Democrats and Republicans are similar. In all, 68 percent of Democrats describe themselves as active news seekers, and 65 percent of Republicans do as well. Independents are somewhat less likely to call themselves active news seekers, 57 percent, but still a majority.

Getting news on social media, on the other hand, has become ubiquitous for all groups. Fully three-quarters of people across the political spectrum now say they get news from social media, including 75 percent of Democrats, 75 percent of Republicans, and 74 percent of independents.

Yet, Democrats and Republicans are more likely than independents to pay for news. Forty-eight percent of independents either pay for a newspaper, magazine, or news site, or donate to public television, public radio, or nonprofit journalism compared to 56 percent of Republicans and 58 percent of Democrats.

Independents are also less likely than Democrats and Republicans to keep up with news about national politics and government. Yet, there are no partisan differences in regards to following news about either people's towns and neighborhoods or local politics and government.

Democrats and Republicans follow national politics more often than independents.



Question: Here are some common news and information topics. Which of these news topics do you follow most often or closely? Select up to three of the following.

Source: Pay for News – Media Insight Project conducted February 16-March 20, 2017, with 2,199 adults nationwide.

In addition, adults of all political affiliations are equally likely to cite a local news source when asked about the news media they use most often (25 percent of Democrats, 21 percent of Republicans, and 20 percent of independents).

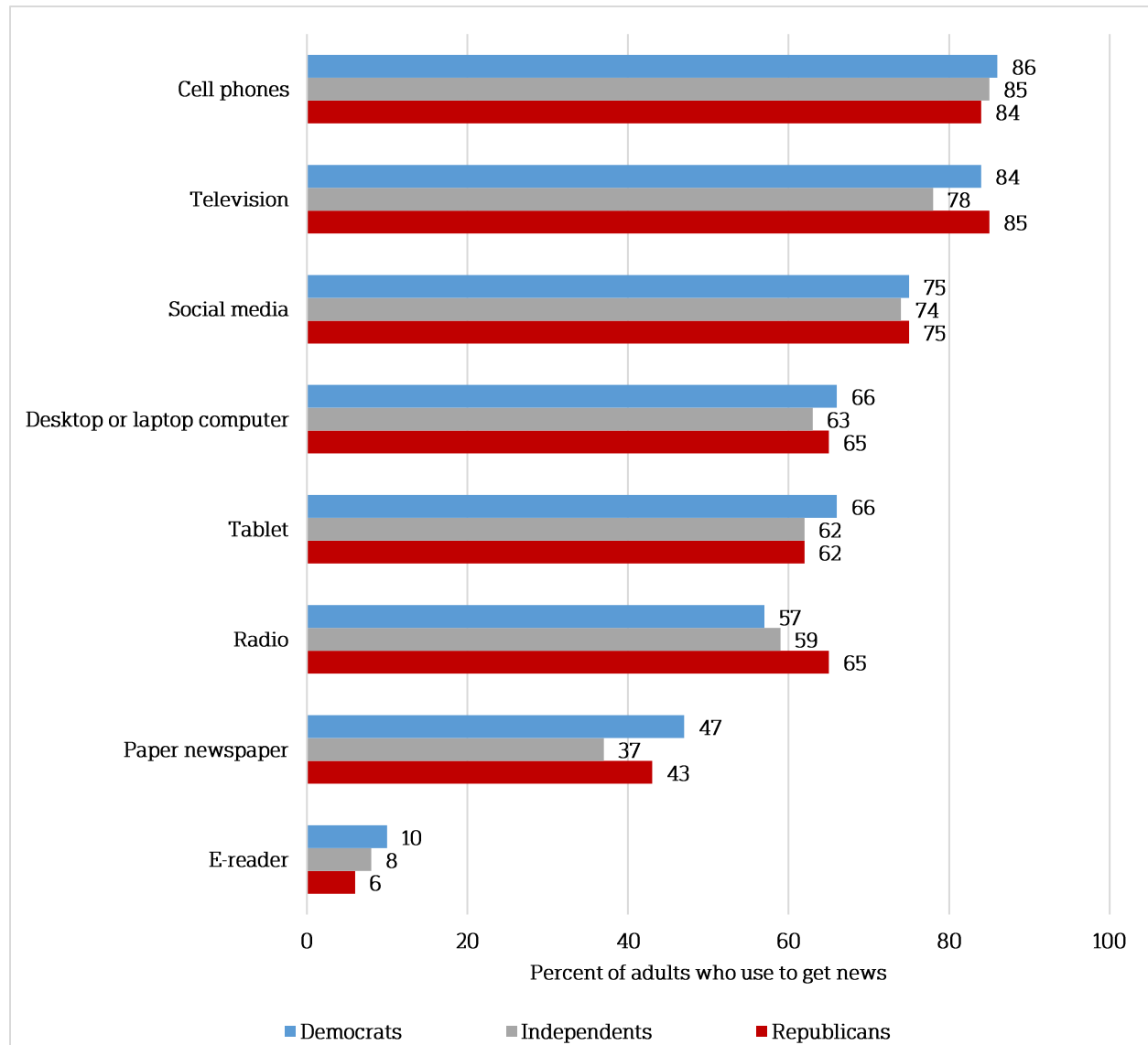
THERE ARE FEW PARTISAN DIFFERENCES IN WHY THEY FOLLOW NEWS, HOW THEY GET IT, AND THE TOPICS FOLLOWED.

Democrats and Republicans show many similarities in the types of media they use, the reasons they follow news, and the topics they follow, but there are still a few partisan differences in news behavior.

Cable news is the most popular source of news for all adults, while broadcast TV is the second-most cited source for news, the study finds. At the same time, Republicans are more likely to say they watch Fox News (CNN is the second-most cited source). Democrats are more likely to say they use CNN and *The New York Times*.

There is also little difference by party in the various platforms people use to follow news. Cell phones and televisions are the most popular platforms for Democrats, Republicans, and independents. Likewise, the use of tablets, desktop or laptop computers, radio, or e-readers to get news is similar across the partisan groups. There are no significant differences in the platforms Democrats and Republicans use, but Democrats are more likely than independents to say they get news from paper versions of newspapers (47 percent vs. 37 percent).

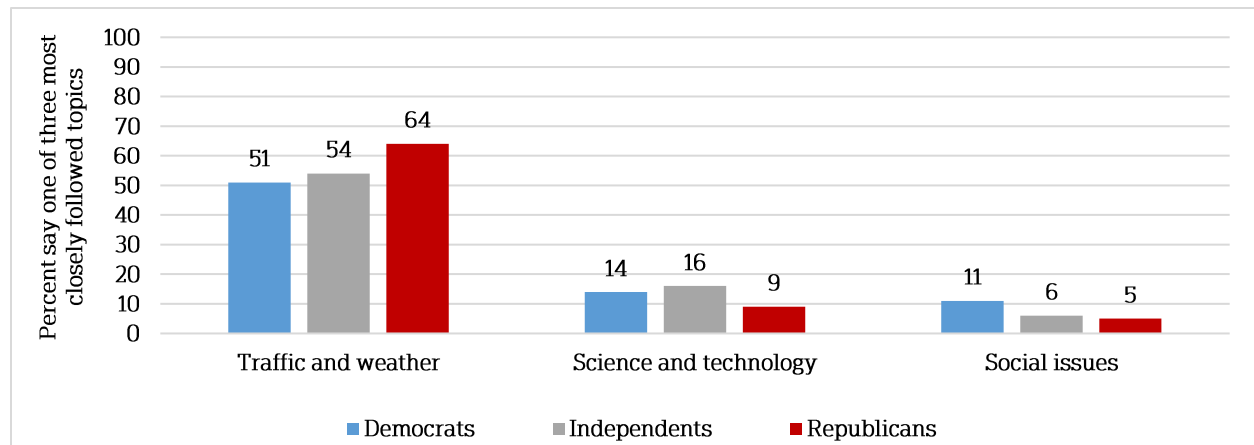
Democrats, Republicans, and independents use similar technology to get news.



Questions: Here are some different devices or technology that you might or might not use to get news and information. Did you use each device or technology to get news and information in the last week, or did you not? These days many people get their news and information from social media. Do you ever get any news from [ITEM]? For each of the following types of media, please indicate whether you have used it for free in the last year, or not. Social media sites.

Source: Pay for News – Media Insight Project conducted February 16-March 20, 2017, with 2,199 adults nationwide.

The topics of news that different partisans follow largely look similar as well, with only slight differences. More Republicans say they follow traffic and weather, while Democrats are more likely to follow science and technology and social issues such as abortion or gay rights.

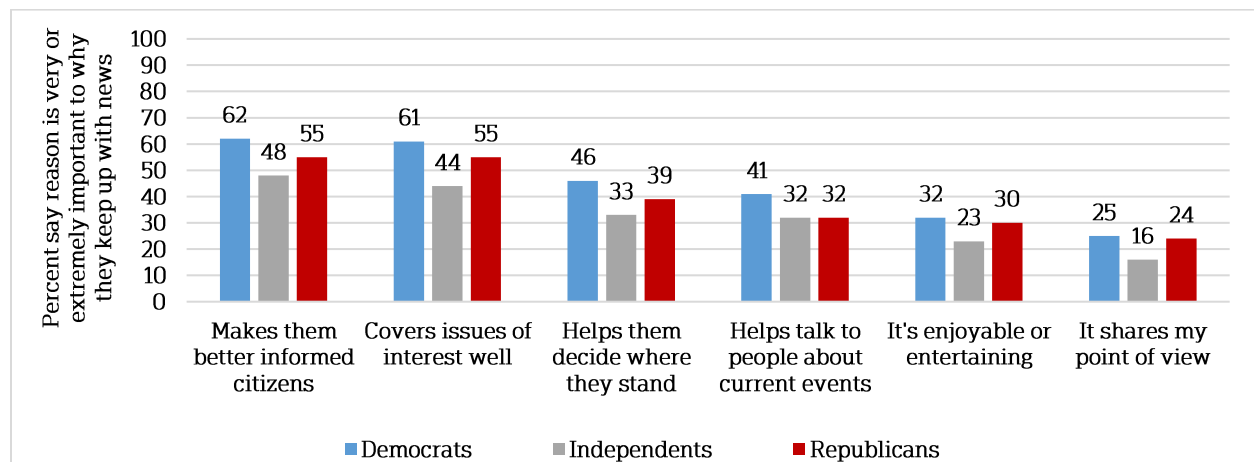
There are a few differences in the topics partisans follow.

Question: Here are some common news and information topics. Which of these news topics do you follow most often or closely? Select up to three of the following.

Source: Pay for News – Media Insight Project conducted February 16-March 20, 2017, with 2,199 adults nationwide.

A few notable partisan differences emerge in the specific types of media Americans pay for. Democrats and Republicans are more likely than independents to pay for a newspaper (33 percent and 33 percent, respectively, vs. 23 percent.) Likewise, 34 percent of Democrats pay for a magazine compared with 26 percent of independents. Lastly, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to donate to public television, public radio, or other nonprofit journalism (20 percent vs. 14 percent).

People of different political parties also follow news for slightly different reasons. Democrats rate several reasons for getting the news more strongly than Republicans, and often both Democrats and Republicans tend to cite several reasons for getting the news more often than independents. For instance, Democrats, compared to Republicans and independents, are more likely to keep up with the news because it helps them talk about current events. Likewise, both Democrats and Republicans, compared to independents, more frequently report that they follow news because it is very good at covering an issue of interest.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans and independents to cite a variety of reasons for why it is important to them to follow the news.

Question: People use news for many reasons. When it comes to the biggest reasons you use news, how important to you is it that it...?

Source: Pay for News – Media Insight Project conducted February 16-March 20, 2017, with 2,199 adults nationwide.

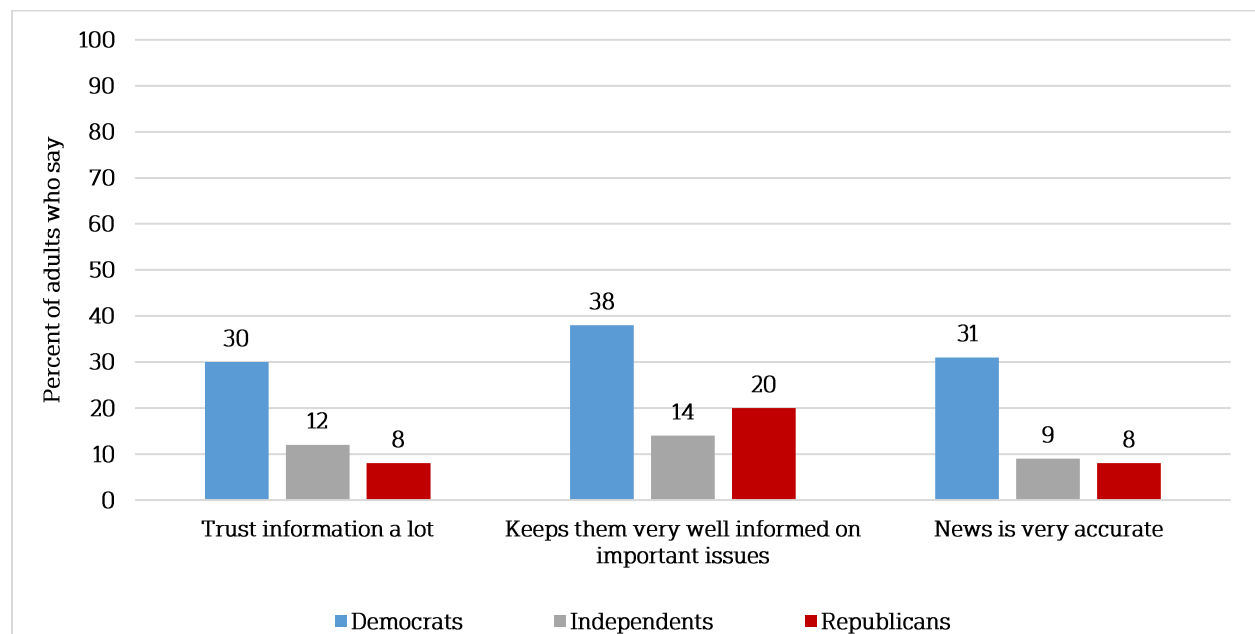
PARTISANSHIP AND ATTITUDES ABOUT NEWS

DEMOCRATS HAVE MUCH MORE POSITIVE VIEWS OF THE MEDIA OVERALL.

In our report on views on the media, Americans were asked a variety of questions about attitudes toward either the media generally or the media they use most often. Across the board, people feel more positive about the media they use than “the news media” in the abstract. And although evaluations of the news media in general are mostly negative, Democrats tend to have more positive evaluations of it than either Republicans or independents.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans or independents to say they trust the information they get from the news media in general “a lot,” that the news media keeps them very well informed on the important issues of the day, and that it is very accurate.

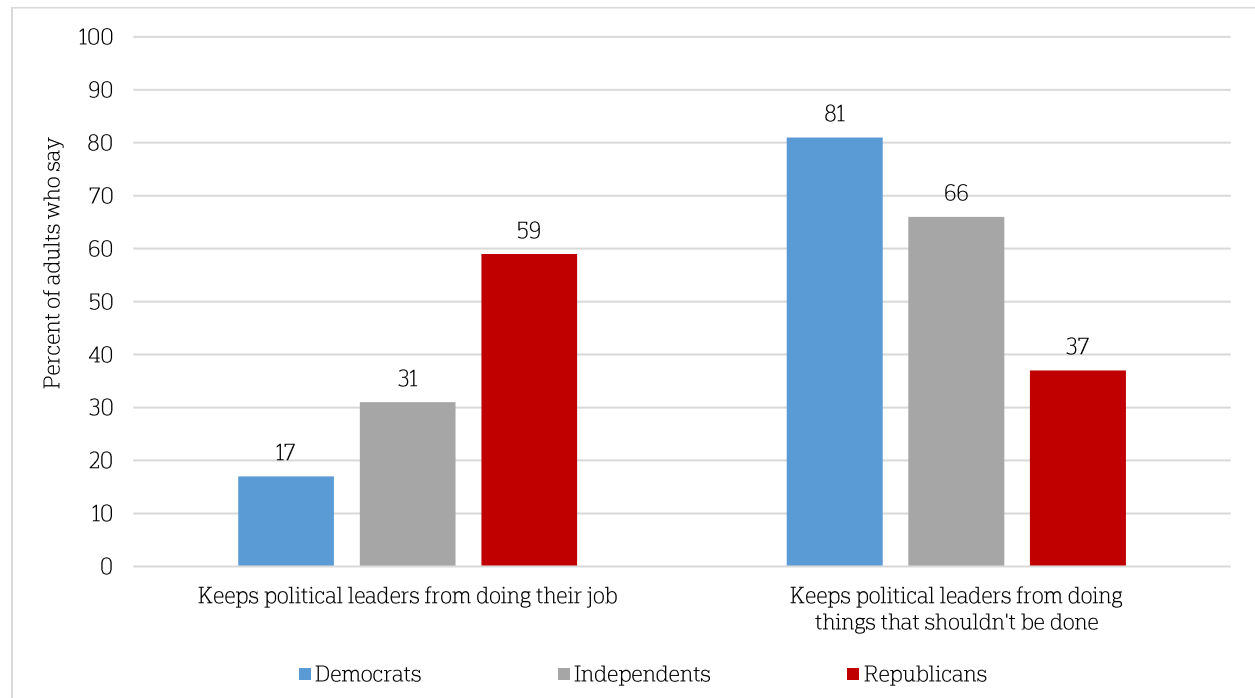
Few Americans give high marks to the media generally, but Democrats are more likely to do so than independents or Republicans.



Questions: Thinking of the news media, how much, if at all, do you trust the information you get? In general, how well do the news media keep you informed of the most important stories of the day? Would you say the news from news media is...?
Source: Views on the Media – Media Insight Project conducted March 8-29, 2017, with 2,036 adults nationwide.

Republicans are more likely to say news organizations in general keep political leaders from doing their job, while Democrats and independents are more likely to say news organizations keep political leaders from doing things that shouldn't be done.

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



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

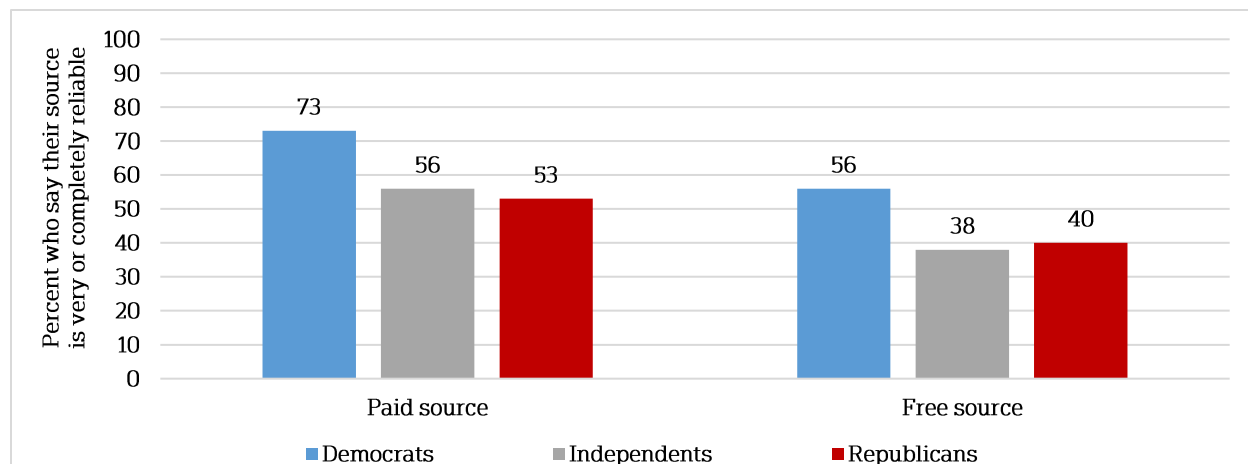
Source: Views on the Media – Media Insight Project conducted March 8-29, 2017, with 2,036 adults nationwide.

DEMOCRATS ALSO HAVE MORE POSITIVE VIEWS OF THE SPECIFIC MEDIA THEY USE.

While much attention is focused on partisan differences in views of media in the abstract, the research also finds differences when people are asked about media they actually use, including those they pay for.

Not only do Democrats have more positive attitudes toward the media overall, they also have more confidence in the news sources they use regularly. Data from both recent Media Insight Project studies—on who pay for news and views of the media—show that Democrats tend to have more trust in information from the media they use, while Republicans and independents are more skeptical of the media they use—even when they are paying for it.

Our research on paying for news asked respondents to cite a source they pay for, or a free source they rely on, and in both cases, Democrats are more likely to see the information they received from their source in a more positive light. Democrats are more likely than Republicans and independents to say both their free sources of news and their paid source of news are more reliable.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans and independents to view their news sources as reliable.

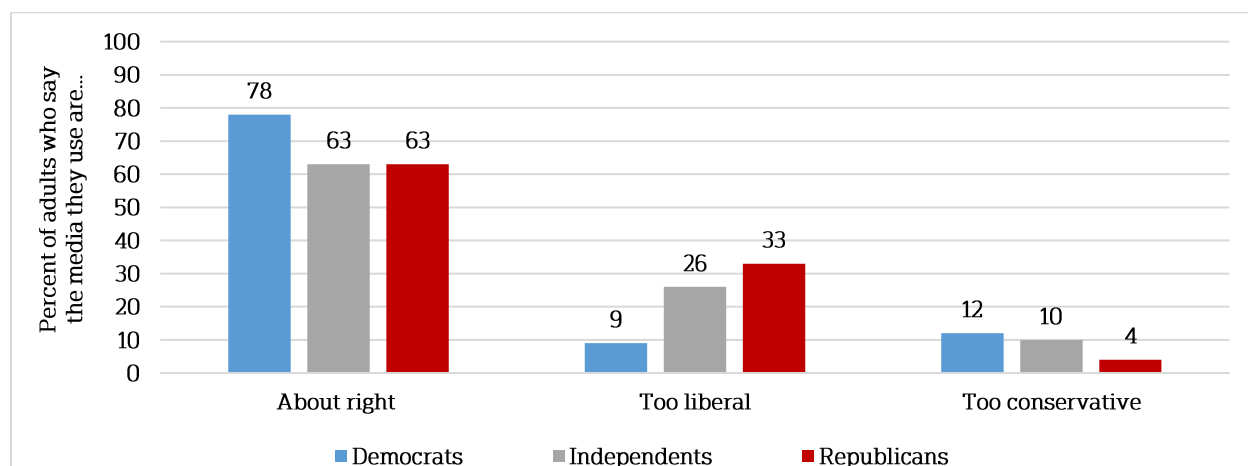
Question: How reliable is the news and information you get from [SOURCE]?

Source: Pay for News – Media Insight Project conducted February 16-March 20, 2017, with 2,199 adults nationwide.

The same differences emerge among newspaper subscribers specifically. Seventy-four percent of Democrats say the newspaper they pay for is very or completely reliable compared with 52 percent of Republican subscribers and 52 percent of independents.

At the same time, according to the views on the media study, Democrats are more likely than both Republicans and independents to say the media they use most often are willing to admit their mistakes rather than try to cover it up. Fifty-five percent of Democrats say the media they use are willing to admit mistakes compared with 43 percent of Republicans and 43 percent of independents.

Then there are other signs of dissatisfaction. For instance, Republicans and independents are also more likely than Democrats to question the political leanings of the media they use. Seventy-eight percent of Democrats say the media they use is just about right in regards to their coverage compared with 63 percent of both Republicans and independents.

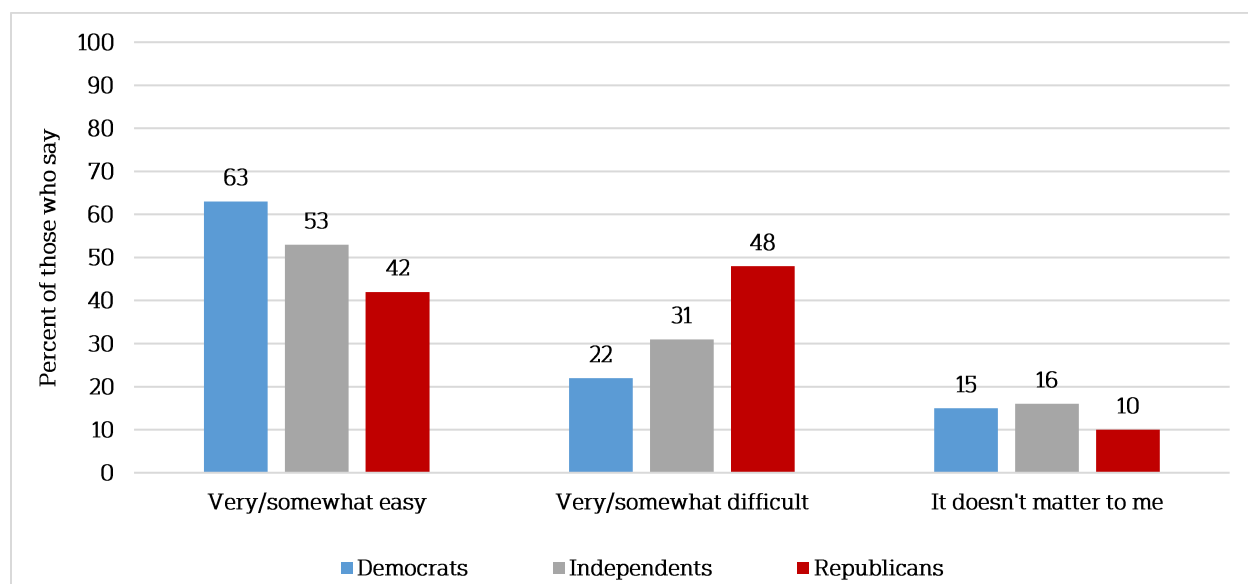
Democrats are less likely than Republicans and independents to question the political leanings of the media they use often.

Question: Do you think the news media you use most often are too liberal, just about right, or too conservative? **Source:** Views on the Media – Media Insight Project conducted March 8-29, 2017, with 2,036 adults nationwide.

Republicans are also more likely than both Democrats and independents to say the sources they use most often hurt democracy rather than protect democracy. Thirty percent of Republicans say the media they use hurt democracy compared with 19 percent of independents and just 12 percent of Democrats.

Another interesting discovery of partisan differences has to do with the distinction between news and opinion in media coverage. Democrats, for instance, are most likely to say it is easy for them to tell the difference between reporting and opinion in the news media generally (63 percent) compared to independents (53 percent), who are in turn more likely to say it is easy for them to do so than Republicans (42 percent). And Republicans are more than twice as likely as Democrats to say they find it difficult to tell the difference.

Democrats are most likely to say it is easy to tell the difference between opinion content and news reporting in the news 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 the news media, or does it not matter to you?
Source: Views on the Media – Media Insight Project conducted March 8-29, 2017, with 2,036 adults nationwide.

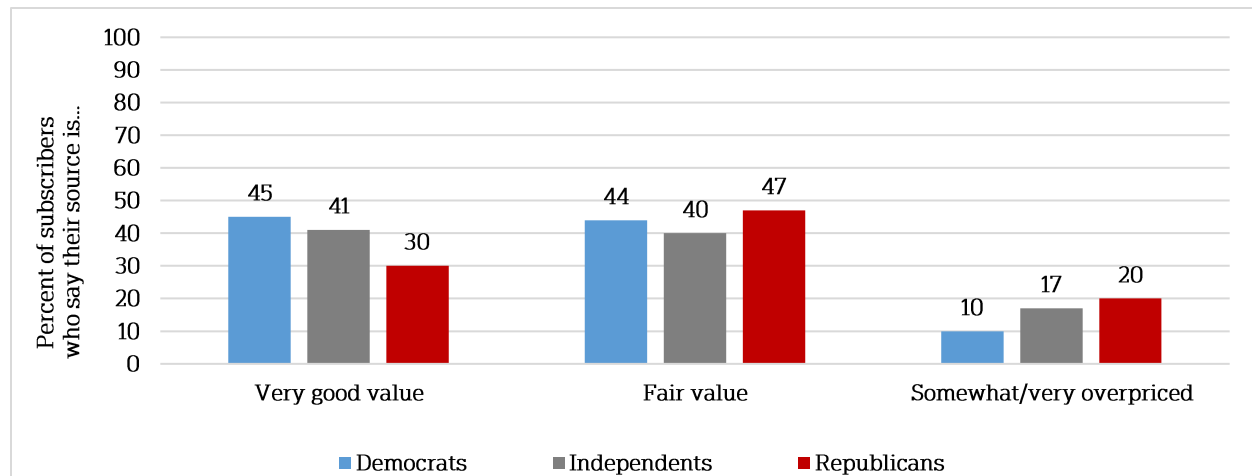
However, there are no significant partisan differences in telling the difference between opinion content and news reporting for the news media people use most often. Sixty-five percent of Democrats, 64 percent of Republicans, and 57 percent of independent say it is easy to tell the difference between opinion content and news reporting in the sources they use most often.

PARTISANSHIP AND PAYING FOR NEWS

DEMOCRATS FEEL BETTER ABOUT THE NEWS THEY PAY FOR THAN REPUBLICANS.

The more negative attitudes of Republicans and independents toward the media when compared with Democrats also relate to differences in their assessment about paying for news.

Republicans, for instance, are more likely than Democrats or independents to view their paid sources as overpriced.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say their paid source is a very good value.

Question: Think about your satisfaction with [SOURCE] given the price you pay for it. Which statement comes closest to your opinion? It is a very good value for the price, it is a fair value for what it gives me, it is somewhat overpriced and not a good value, or it is very overpriced compared to the value it gives me.

Source: Pay for News – Media Insight Project conducted February 16-March 20, 2017, with 2,199 adults nationwide.

This is especially true when looking only at newspaper subscribers. Thirty-five percent of Democrats say their newspaper subscription is a very good value compared with 27 percent of independents and 17 percent of Republicans. Likewise, 27 percent of Republican subscribers say their newspaper is overpriced compared with 21 percent of independents and 13 percent of Democrats.

Democrats who pay for news also are more likely to feel good about contributing to a news organization. Thirty-seven percent of Democratic subscribers say they feel good about contributing to a news organization compared with 27 percent of independents and 24 percent of Republicans.

DEMOCRATS MAY BE MORE LIKELY TO PAY FOR A SOURCE THEY CURRENTLY USE FOR FREE.

As publishers drive toward reader revenue strategies, are there clues in party identification about who does not currently pay for news and is unlikely to?

Some. To begin with, Republicans and independents are more likely to say they don't pay for news because they don't trust news and information from the media (23 percent and 17 percent, respectively, vs. 5 percent for Democrats). This echoes other data points, including about reliability of media they use and whether media often cover up mistakes.

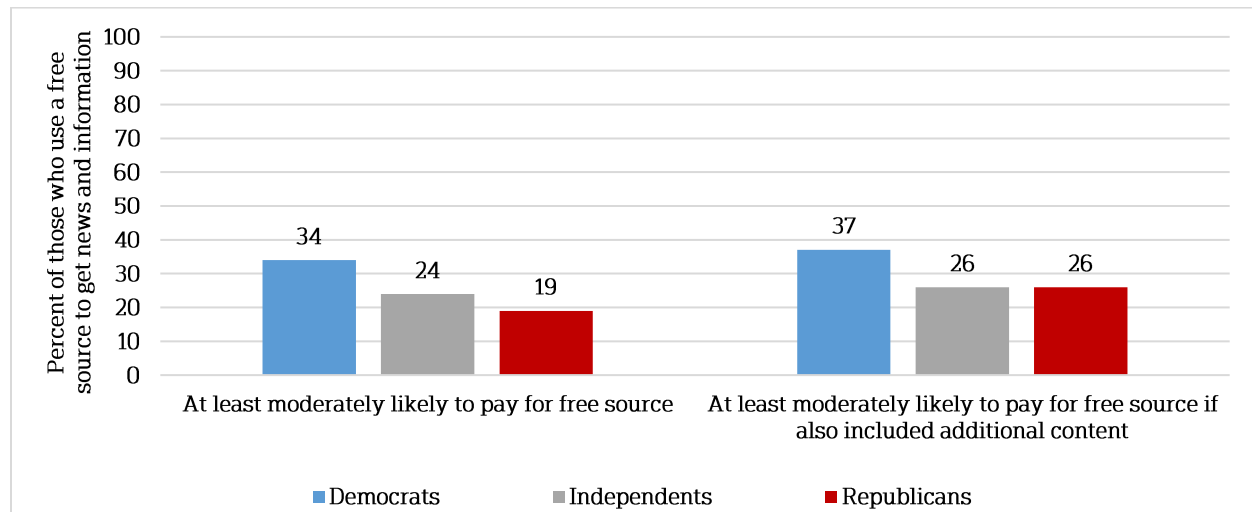
Independents are also more likely than Democrats to say they don't pay for any news because they are not interested enough (45 percent of independents vs. 33 percent for Democrats and 42 percent of Republicans). This sits alongside other data points that show independents cite fewer reasons for following the news.

A couple final questions posed hypothetical questions about willingness to pay for free sources in the future, with Democrats again responding the most positively. Democrats currently are more likely than Republicans or independents to indicate a stronger hint of being willing to pay for their free source. Fourteen percent of Democrats say they would be very or extremely likely to pay for a source they currently use for free. Just 6 percent of Republicans and 8 percent of independents say the same.

There is a little less of a divide when it comes to being moderately willing to pay—20 percent of Democrats are in that camp, 12 percent of Republicans, and 15 percent of independents.

These differences between partisans remain when proposing that their subscription would also include access to paid content from additional sources. More Republicans say they would be likely to pay if more content is included, but still fewer Republicans and independents than Democrats say they would pay for such expanded content.

Democrats are most likely to say they would be willing to pay for their current free source of choice, while Republicans are most swayed by adding additional content if they are going to be charged.



Questions: How likely is it that you would be willing to pay for news and information from [FREE SOURCE] at some point? What if a subscription to [FREE SOURCE] also included access to paid content from various other news and information sources, how likely is it that you would be willing to pay for news and information from [FREE SOURCE] at some point? Source: Pay for News – Media Insight Project conducted February 16-March 20, 2017, with 2,199 adults nationwide.

ABOUT THE STUDY

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The data used in this report were drawn from two independent surveys 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 first survey, [Paying for News: Why People Subscribe and What It Says About the Future of Journalism](#), was conducted from February 16 through March 20, 2017. The second survey, [“My” Media Versus “The” Media: Trust in News Depends on Which News Media You Mean](#), was conducted from March 8 through March 27, 2017. Both surveys were funded by API. Staff from API and The AP-NORC Center collaborated on all aspects of the studies.

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% 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 these surveys 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.

In the paying for news study...

- 2,199 panelists completed the survey—1,885 via the web and 314 via telephone. The sample includes 1,194 who pay for a news subscription and 1,005 who do not pay for any news. The final stage completion rate is 31.2 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 34.4 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 94.7 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 10.2 percent.
- The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 2.7 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

In the study of how people evaluate the media they use versus the media overall half of respondents were asked questions about “the news media” and the other half were asked the same questions about “the news media you use most often.” With this study...

- 2,036 panelists completed the survey—1,702 via the web and 334 via telephone. The final stage completion rate is 35.6 percent, the weighted household panel response rate is 34.4 percent, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 94.7 percent, for a cumulative response rate of 11.6 percent.
- The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.0 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error for experimental Condition A (“the news media” is +/- 4.2 percentage points. The margin of sampling error for experimental Condition B (“the news media you use”) is +/- 4.0 percentage points.

Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive for completing these surveys. All interviews were conducted in English by professional interviewers who were carefully trained on the specific survey for this study.

Once the samples were 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 oversampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, Census region, race/ethnicity, and education. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2016 Current Population Survey. The weighted data, which reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over, were used for all analyses.

Details about the Media Insight Project can be found at: www.mediainsight.org.

CONTRIBUTING RESEARCHERS

From the American Press Institute

Tom Rosenstiel
Jeff Sonderman
Kevin Loker

From NORC at the University of Chicago

Jennifer Benz
David Sterrett
Dan Malato
Trevor Thompson
Amanda Lenhart
Liz Kantor
Alexander Agadjanian

From The Associated Press

Emily Swanson

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

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS-NORC CENTER FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH

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

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

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

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

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