



AP-NORC AND ROBERT F. KENNEDY HUMAN RIGHTS SURVEY: Americans are concerned about threats to the free press

The public is worried about a variety of problems threatening a free press in the United States and around the world, though trust in the news media remains low.

Chicago, IL and New York, NY, May 1, 2023 — Ahead of World Press Freedom Day on Wednesday, May 3, a new study from [Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#) reveals Americans are concerned about attacks on journalists, restrictions on press freedoms, and the spread of misinformation.

Many Americans are also skeptical about the role the news media is currently playing in democracy. A majority of adults have some degree of confidence in the news media to report the news fully, accurately, and fairly; but just 16% are very confident and 45% have little to no confidence at all. Those polled are more likely to see the news media as hurting democracy and increasing political division in the United States than not. Republicans tend to view the news media less favorably than Democrats as they more often see the news media as increasing political division (81% vs. 72%) and hurting democracy (61% vs. 23%). The survey also found that three in four adults perceive the political preferences of news organization owners as having a major influence on the news media in the United States.

Most Americans are also at least somewhat concerned about direct threats to the press, including nearly one-third who are extremely or very concerned about attacks on journalists.

"We are at a critical moment when attacks on press freedom and civic space threaten our democracy, said Kerry Kennedy, president of Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights. "This survey shows the American people not only value the news media but gravely fear it is not being protected."

Nearly all adults (93%) view the spread of misinformation to be a problem. About two-thirds of adults attribute responsibility for the spread of misinformation to U.S. politicians, social media companies, and their users. But 58%, are holding the news media as responsible as well. And when it comes to fixing the problem, 63% of adults say the news media has a great deal or quite a bit of responsibility to address the spread of misinformation.

"The public recognizes the challenges facing news media, and they are supportive of solutions to address them," said Jennifer Benz, deputy director of The AP-NORC Center. "The public sees value in investing in civic education and in independent news organizations, strengthening protections for journalists, and increasing diversity in newsrooms."

The survey also finds that people value in-depth and investigative reporting but are less likely to engage with that content. A majority say news stories that report the facts of the issues facing the country or that include in-depth background information and analysis of the issues are extremely or very helpful

when it comes to understanding issues important to them. But when they are trying to understand the issues they care about, people more often find themselves scanning the news headlines than engaging with in-depth or investigative reporting.

As part of its ongoing commitment to civic space and free press protection, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights annually celebrates exemplary human rights and social justice reporting in its [Book and Journalism Awards](#). The 2023 winners, who are selected by their journalist peers, will be announced during a [virtual celebration](#) on May 3 at 12pm ET/PT.

About the Study

This [survey](#), funded by Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Staff from NORC at the University of Chicago, The Associated Press, and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Survey Methodology

The nationwide poll was conducted in English between March 30 and April 3, 2023, using the AmeriSpeak Omnibus®, a monthly multi-client survey using NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. Online and telephone interviews using landline and cell phones were conducted with adults age 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia; 1,002 completed the survey—944 via the web and 58 via telephone. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.4 percentage points.

For more information, please visit www.apnorc.org.

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.

www.apnorc.org

The Associated Press is an independent global news organization dedicated to factual reporting. Founded in 1846, AP today remains the most trusted source of fast, accurate, unbiased news in all formats and the essential provider of the technology and services vital to the news business. More than half the world's population sees AP journalism every day.

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NORC at the University of Chicago is an objective, non-partisan research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions. Since 1941, NORC has conducted groundbreaking studies, created and applied innovative methods and tools, and advanced principles of scientific integrity and collaboration. Today, government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world partner with NORC to transform increasingly complex information into useful knowledge.

www.norc.org

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. In its 10 years, The AP-NORC Center has

conducted more than 250 studies exploring the critical issues facing the public, covering topics like health care, the economy, COVID-19, trust in media, and more.

About Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights

Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that has worked to realize Robert F. Kennedy’s dream of a more just and peaceful world since 1968. In partnership with local activists, we advocate for key human rights issues— championing change makers and pursuing strategic litigation at home and around the world. And to ensure change that lasts, we foster a social-good approach to business and investment and educate millions of students about human rights and social justice. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [TikTok](#), and [Twitter](#): @RFKHumanRights.

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For more information:

Contact Eric Young for NORC at young-eric@norc.org or (703) 217-6814 (cell).

Contact Nicole Meir for AP at nmeir@ap.org or (212) 621-7536.

Contact Amy Zelvin Reid for Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights at reid@rfkhumanrights.org.