

**REPORTERS
COMMITTEE**
FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

PRESS FREEDOM FOR THE PEOPLE

BUILDING SUPPORT FOR A FREE PRESS AMID CURRENT PUBLIC ATTITUDES



RESEARCH AND REPORT BY

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and Echelon Insights for the Reporters
Committee for Freedom for the Press and the Democracy Fund

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FOREWORD



BY JENN TOPPER

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR, REPORTERS COMMITTEE FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

A robust free press is vital to an informed public.

It's with that in mind that we sought to understand the public's perceptions of press freedom at a moment in time when trust in the press remains low, and when the president of the United States regularly deems members of the press "enemy of the people" and refers to entire news organizations as "fake news." The research took on even more significance after the murder of four journalists and one sales assistant at the Capital Gazette in Annapolis, Maryland, by a gunman who had a long history of making threats against the newspaper.

We learned, through a series of focus groups and a 2,000-voter survey, that there is a lack of urgency around the idea that press freedom is at risk here in the U.S. Press freedom advocates see an alarming confluence of threats to journalists and the news media, including harmful rhetoric emanating from

government officials, investigations of unauthorized disclosures to the press, tighter restrictions on access to the White House and key agencies and officials, lawsuits targeted at crippling or bankrupting news outlets, all combined with increasing economic strain on newsrooms. The American public, however, does not see press freedom as under threat and is much more concerned with perceptions of bias and influence.

Our concern is that the culminating effect of all of these disparate factors will be chips at the First Amendment and its protections for a free and independent press. If the public is conditioned to accept these gradual limitations on press freedom as normal — and in some cases even echo the attacks themselves, rather than vigorously defend against them — we are in a precarious position.

There is hope, however. The data gathered from the survey and focus groups suggest steps for press freedom advocates, journalists and news media organizations to **reinforce the value of a free press in the eyes of the public** and build broader support among key constituencies:

- **Highlight the press's role to inform**
- **Address perceptions of bias in news coverage**
- **Don't make President Trump the focus of the conversation**
- **Reach out to politically diverse audiences**
- **Illustrate threats to press freedom by using real examples**
- **Be transparent about newsgathering decisions**
- **Promote accountability when mistakes are made**

When we talk about preserving freedom of the press and understanding the public's views in this area, it's important to acknowledge the many factors that contribute to the public's perception of and trust in news and journalism.

Much valuable research has been conducted to address Americans' views of the media and the roots of the decline in trust. We relied on insights gleaned from studies by the Knight Foundation and Gallup, the Trusting News project, Pew Research Center, the Media Insight Project and Poynter, along with input from a variety of stakeholders and advisers to inform the survey at the various stages. Our goal was to analyze how some of those factors affect the public's belief in and, crucially, its support of the free press.

Freedom of the press is a nonpartisan issue, and it is essential to all of us who rely on information to participate in democracy and hold government accountable. With this research we hope to provide more insight into how we, the people, can ensure that press freedom, a key pillar of the First Amendment and American democracy, holds strong.

KEY FINDINGS

While an unequivocal majority of registered voters believe in the importance of a free press, many do not see this crucial freedom at risk. Rather, for many, the national news media has let them down, and trust in national news is low — among all, and especially among Republicans and Independents. Moreover, despite intensifying political attacks against the press, many voters do not see much urgency around defending the media, nor even believe that the news media is currently under threat.

Newly-released bipartisan research¹ shows that voters value the role of the press to inform, and many are bothered by what they see as the press filtering news or advancing an agenda; this is particularly true among Republicans and Independents. Yet even Democrats are frustrated by their perception of the media sensationalizing stories for the sake of views or clicks. And across partisan lines, Americans are very troubled by the relationship they perceive between the business of news and the gathering of news itself.

While other research organizations have documented the current trust gap between voters and the news media², this bipartisan national survey points to a number of ways the news media and others committed to a free press can begin to create bridges toward more support and building back that trust.

Foremost is to embrace the press's role *to inform*. The media's role to provide information is the strongest driver of support for the press — and needs to be the cornerstone for building back trust. The research also suggests that the news media needs to explore their own biases and hold themselves accountable, and that both the media and advocates should keep the conversation free of partisanship, and use facts to demonstrate the urgency of the threat to freedom of the press.

This bipartisan research was sponsored by the **Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press** and **Democracy Fund**. The survey was designed and conducted by **Greenberg Quinlan Rosner** and **Echelon Insights**. The nationwide mixed-mode survey of 2,000 registered voters was conducted from November 6-12, 2017, and has an overall margin of error of plus or minus 2.2 points. The coalition also conducted four focus groups in two locations

¹ Echelon Insights and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner jointly conducted a nationally-representative survey of 2,000 registered voters from November 6-12, 2017. The survey was mixed-mode: 1,400 interviews were conducted online, and 600 were conducted via telephone, with 60 percent reached via cellphone. While margin of error cannot be calculated for an online sample, the margin of error for a random sample of 2,000 is +/- 2.2. The margin of error on the telephone portion (which is probability-based and can be calculated) is +/- 4.0. Prior to the survey, the team conducted four focus groups in Kansas City and Orlando on September 6-7, 2017.

² Many recent public opinion polls show similar trends, including public work from [the Knight Foundation](#), [Pew](#), [Ipsos](#), [Poynter](#), and others.

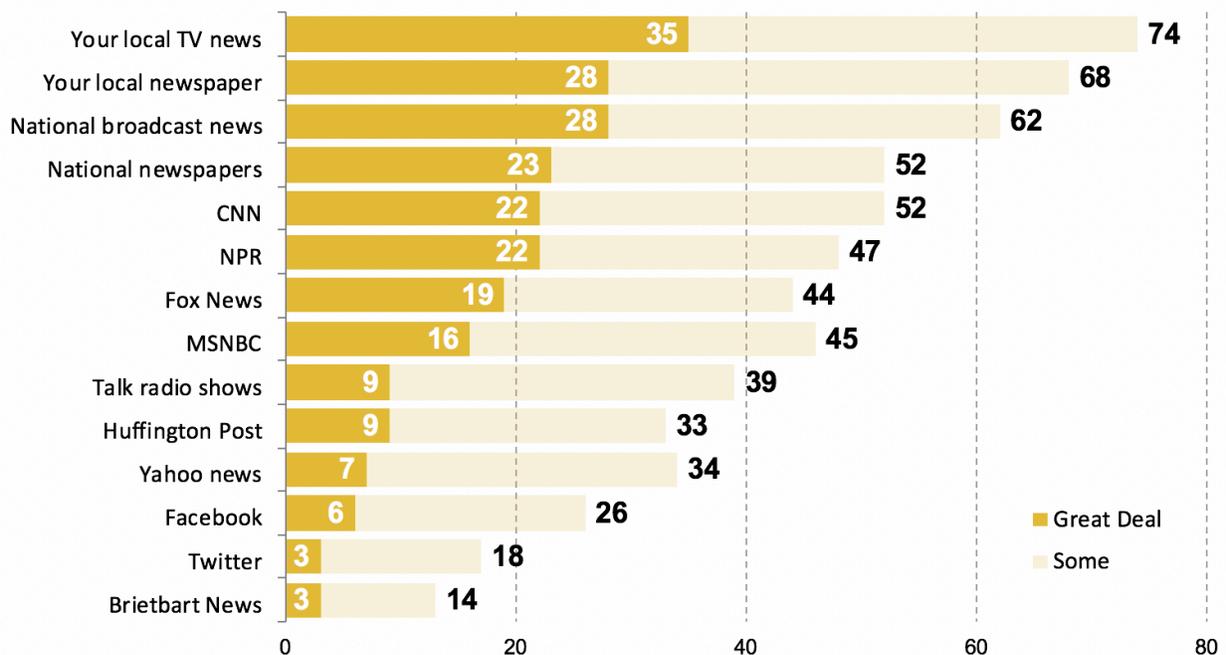
with different segments of the public to inform the questionnaire and provide qualitative insights.

LOW TRUST IN NATIONAL MEDIA AND ONLINE SOURCES

As other studies have shown, trust in the national news media is considerably low, especially the share of Americans that have a “great deal” of trust in certain outlets. Only 28 percent of registered voters report to have a great deal of trust in national broadcast news and only 23 percent say they have a great deal of trust in national newspapers.

FIGURE 1: TRUST IN CABLE NEWS AND ONLINE NEWS SOURCES IS LOW

How much you trust that news outlet or platform – do you trust it a great deal, some, just a little, or not at all?



Trust in national news media is low overall, and particularly low among Republican³ and Independent voters. Only 15 percent of Republicans and 17 percent of Independents strongly trust national broadcast news, like the NBC Nightly News, CBS Evening News, or PBS NewsHour⁴, while 41 percent of Democrats have a great deal of trust in broadcast news. And just 12 percent of both Republicans and Independents trust national newspapers like The New York Times, The Washington Post, or The Wall Street Journal⁵, while 35 percent of Democrats do.

³ Throughout, totals for Republicans and Democrats include those who “lean” Republican and Democratic.

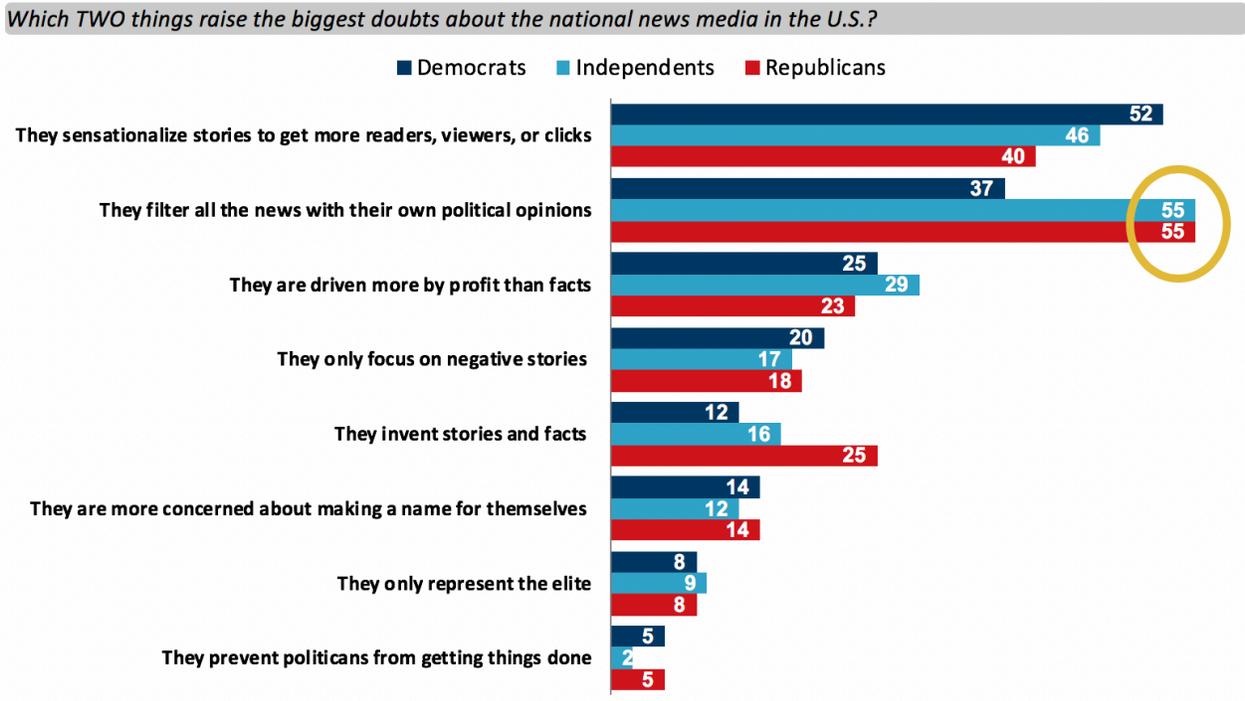
⁴ We gave respondents these examples of national broadcast news.

⁵ Given as examples of national newspapers.

Despite this lack of trust, **nearly all voters (95 percent) agree on the importance of having a free press.** Across party affiliation, an overwhelming majority believes it is important that the press be free in the United States, and most voters (76 percent) know that freedom of the press is a First Amendment right.

Yet there are many ways voters feel the news media are letting them down. Many believe the media sensationalize stories to get more readers, viewers or clicks, and that the media filter the news with their own political opinions. On the left, concern is more about sensationalizing stories: 52 percent of Democratic voters say this is one of their biggest doubts about the media. On the right, 55 percent of Republican voters say bias in reporting is a top concern. Independent voters look slightly more like Republicans and are more worried about political bias.

FIGURE 2: DRIVING CONCERNS ABOUT THE NEWS MEDIA



“ACROSS PARTY AFFILIATION, AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY BELIEVES IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE PRESS BE FREE IN THE UNITED STATES, AND MOST VOTERS (76 PERCENT) KNOW THAT FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IS A FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHT.”

REGAINING TRUST

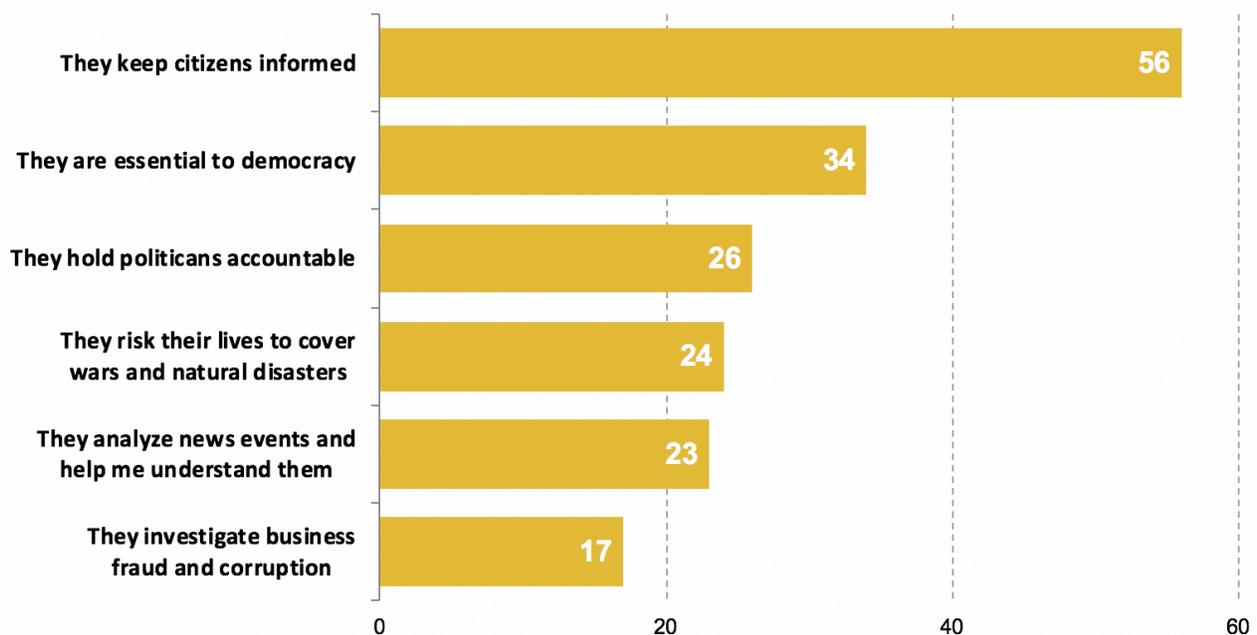
At a time when the public understands the need for a free press, yet many do not see a direct threat — there are a few potential paths forward. This research suggests six key building blocks to cultivating a different narrative about the media and regaining voters' trust.

1. EMBRACE THE PRESS'S ROLE TO INFORM

Voters want a news media that informs them of the facts. Not only do most see this as the press's highest value and a reason to defend the press, it is a core media function that cuts across the political spectrum and appeals to Republicans, Democrats, and Independents in nearly equal measure.

FIGURE 3: MAJORITY VALUE MEDIA TO KEEP PEOPLE INFORMED

Below is a list of reasons why some people value the media. Which are the TWO things that you value most about the national news media in the U.S.?



Highlighting the news media's role in keeping citizens informed bolsters feelings around the media and for many is a compelling reason to defend the press. More than three-quarters of voters say the following statement is a convincing reason to defend press freedom, with 51 percent saying it is very convincing:

The media’s job is to provide information to the public about what is happening in their government and communities, so people can make informed decisions about what they think. Without a press that’s free to publish this information, people would have to rely solely on what politicians and social media tell them to make their decisions.

Underscoring the news media’s responsibility to inform the public is a far more convincing reason to defend press freedom than other frames, such as highlighting the role of the press in a democracy or even making comparisons to press treatment in other countries. By double digits, more Americans see this as a compelling reason to stand up for the news media.

FIGURE 4: HIGHLIGHTING ROLE IS TO INFORM MOST COMPELLING



Yet voters do not always see the news media living up to this. In focus groups, participants cite excessive punditry, a focus on “petty” issues and lack of informative coverage as key complaints. “Just keep it real, tell the truth, try and be as unbiased as possible, and stick to the important stuff,” advises one participant in Kansas City.

This potentially suggests a refocus on standard journalism principles. Rather than prioritizing what may enrage or elicit an emotional reaction from viewers, news media would be best served by focusing on the who/what/

where/why/how of stories. And when the news media is attacked, the danger should be framed around limiting their ability to inform the public rather than as a threat to democratic principles.

2. ADDRESS PERCEPTION OF BIAS

Across the spectrum, voters report wanting to hear the news that presents the full story from all sides.⁶ They are frustrated by perceived biases (especially Republicans and Independents), and many say that they do not want a news outlet that just gives them news that reflects their own point of view.

Yet there is a sense that the news media filters their stories through their own political opinions. Majorities of Republicans and Independents say bias is one of their top doubts about the news media, and over one-third of Democrats say so as well.

In focus groups, participants mention prominent anchors and TV news personalities, and they remark that many need to do a better job of keeping their views to themselves — both on air and on social media. “Keep your own personal feelings,” says one woman in Kansas City, about a prominent anchor, “keep that for dinner parties... put on the poker face.”

Voters also express concern about the business of the media. A man in the Kansas City focus group says: “I think some if not a lot of bias is based on finances; if certain stations can get more money from certain sources, then they are going to pick the side to make the most money. News is a business; the object is to make a profit.”

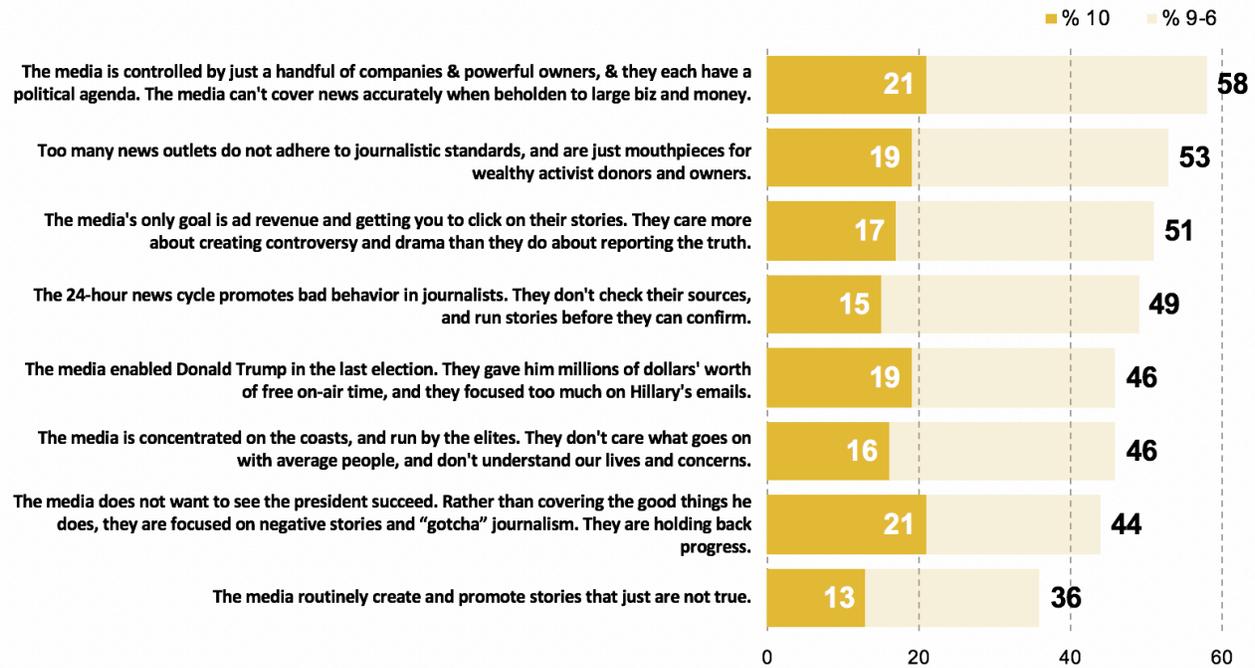
For many, the profit imperative in the news business can lead to bad outcomes, including pushing its own agenda. A majority of voters, 58 percent, agree that:

The media is controlled by just a handful of companies and powerful owners, and they each have a political agenda. The media can't cover news accurately when they are beholden to large business and money.

⁶ We are mindful of the problem of “whataboutism” that can stem from “presenting both sides;” addressing this dynamic requires serious thought.

FIGURE 5: BIAS LINKED TO MONEY AND INFLUENCE

A 10 would mean you strongly agree with that statement, and a 0 would mean you strongly disagree with that statement.



Majorities of voters also feel that news organizations cut journalistic corners as mouthpieces for activist owners and that the media's goal is only ad revenue over reporting the news. This connection of money, ownership and agenda drives the distrust toward the media — much less so than claims of “fake news.” In fact, only 36 percent of voters believe that “the media routinely create and promote stories that are just not true.”

Across these doubts, Republicans and Independents are more critical. Republicans and Independents are more skeptical of the press's ability to remain impartial despite powerful owners and wealthy donors pushing their own political agendas. Seventy-two percent of Republicans and 64 percent of Independents agree that the news media is beholden to big business. Across a series of doubts about the news media — with the exception of the media enabling the election of President Trump — Independents and Republicans are far more skeptical of the press.

“THIS CONNECTION OF MONEY, OWNERSHIP AND AGENDA DRIVES THE DISTRUST TOWARD THE MEDIA — MUCH LESS SO THAN CLAIMS OF ‘FAKE NEWS.’”

FIGURE 6: REPUBLICANS AND INDEPENDENTS FAR MORE CRITICAL⁷

	Total %6-10	Democrats %6-10	Independents %6-10	Republicans %6-10
Beholden to business and money	58	43	64	72
Mouthpiece of owners	53	44	55	63
Only goal is ad revenue	51	33	60	70
24-hour news cycle and fact-checking	49	40	42	59
Enabled Trump in 2016	46	71	29	23
Run by the elites	46	33	44	60
Does not want to see President succeed	44	16	50	74
Create stories that are not true	36	19	38	53

Many outlets have politically diversified their editorial staff or punditry to address bias. Other changes to the newsroom could potentially address these issues — like limiting journalists’ social media commentary (as some have done), or even making a change in the stories that a newsroom covers. For example, many focus group participants criticized the media for focusing on Melania Trump’s high-heeled shoes as she went to visit Houston after Hurricane Harvey. “Seems like [Trump is] trying to do the right thing and all they’re doing is looking for something to hammer on,” says a Kansas City man.

3. KEEP PRESIDENT TRUMP OUT OF THE PRESS FREEDOM CONVERSATION

Overall, the public is mixed on how it rates President Trump’s relationship with the media. Half approve of how the media is covering him; 48 percent disapprove of the media’s coverage. At the same time, only 37 percent of voters approve of the way President Trump is acting toward the media, while 62 percent disapprove.

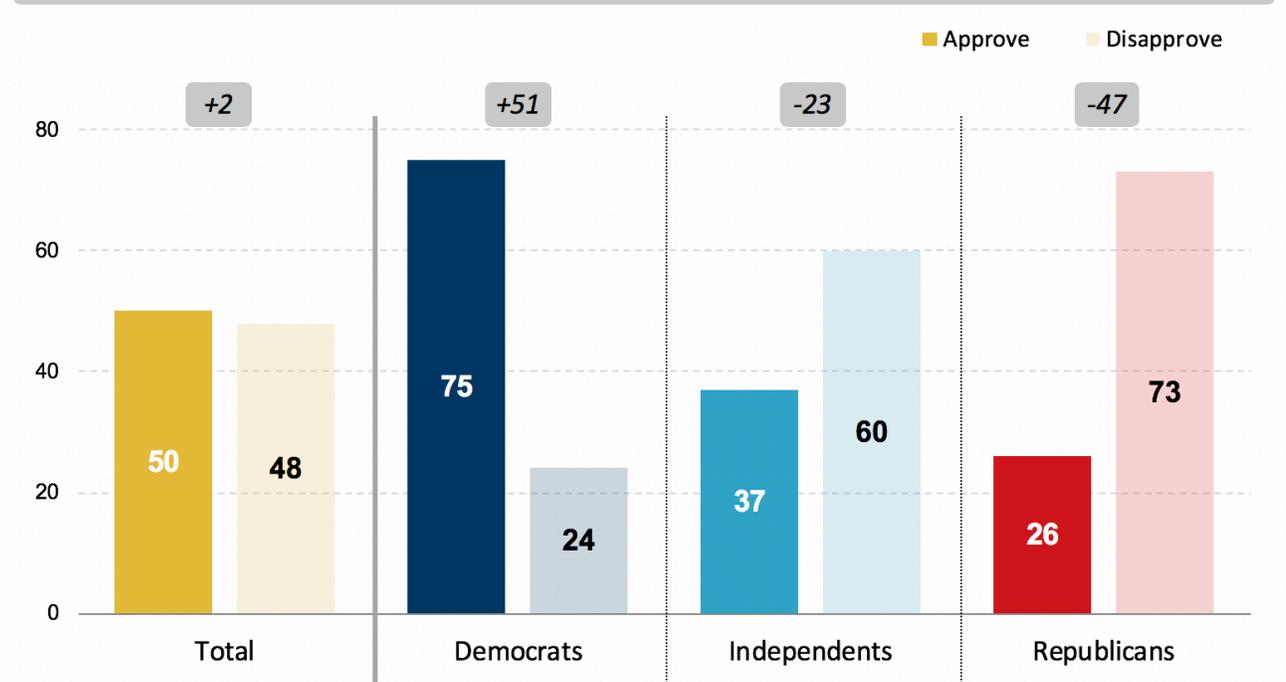
Of course, the overall numbers do not tell the whole story. Approval of the media’s treatment of Trump is strongly driven by Democrats: 75 percent of Democrats approve of how the media treats the president, and 91 percent disapprove of how President Trump is acting toward the media.

⁷ See Appendix for full text of media concerns tested, or see Figure 5.

Majorities of Independents and Republicans *disapprove* of how the media covers him (60 percent of Independents disapprove, and 73 percent of Republicans). A large majority (68 percent) of Republicans approve of how Trump treats the media. Sixty-two percent of Independents disapprove — *meaning that Independents disapprove of both the behavior of the media and President Trump toward one another.*

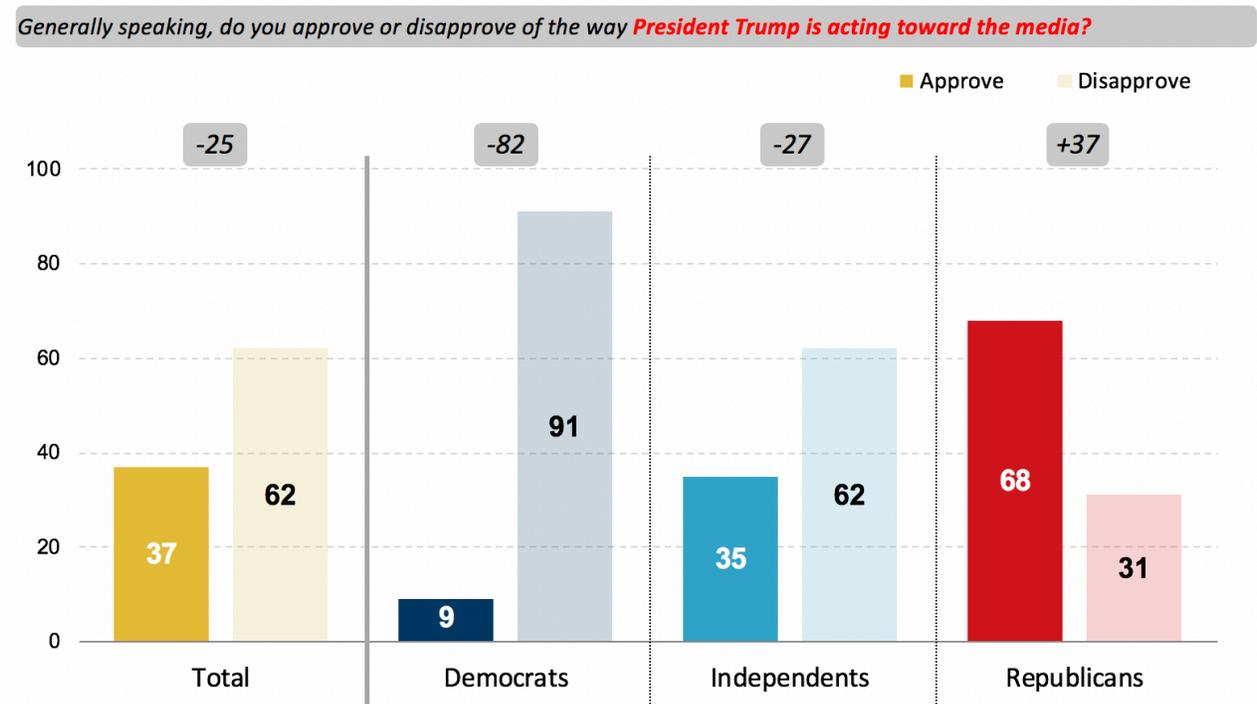
FIGURE 7: APPROVAL OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF TRUMP STRONGLY DRIVEN BY DEMOCRATS

Generally speaking, do you approve or disapprove of the way *the media is covering President Trump?*



“FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IS A NONPARTISAN ISSUE, AND IT IS ESSENTIAL TO ALL OF US WHO RELY ON INFORMATION TO PARTICIPATE IN DEMOCRACY AND HOLD GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABLE.”

FIGURE 8: INDEPENDENTS DISAPPROVE OF BOTH PRESIDENT TRUMP AND THE MEDIA



These polarized results suggest that the media and others who wish to build the case to defend the press best leave President Trump out of this particular appeal. A message that pits politicians against the media and highlights the media's need to stand up to them tests relatively well when kept in the abstract. Majorities of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans say that the following message is a convincing reason to defend the press:

Corrupt politicians are trying to muzzle the media and free press to distract voters and keep people from learning the truth. We need the press to stand up to them.

Yet when split with the same statement, but adding President Trump's name, there is a double-digit drop (16 points for Independents and 21 points for Republicans) in the numbers of who find it a convincing reason to defend the press.

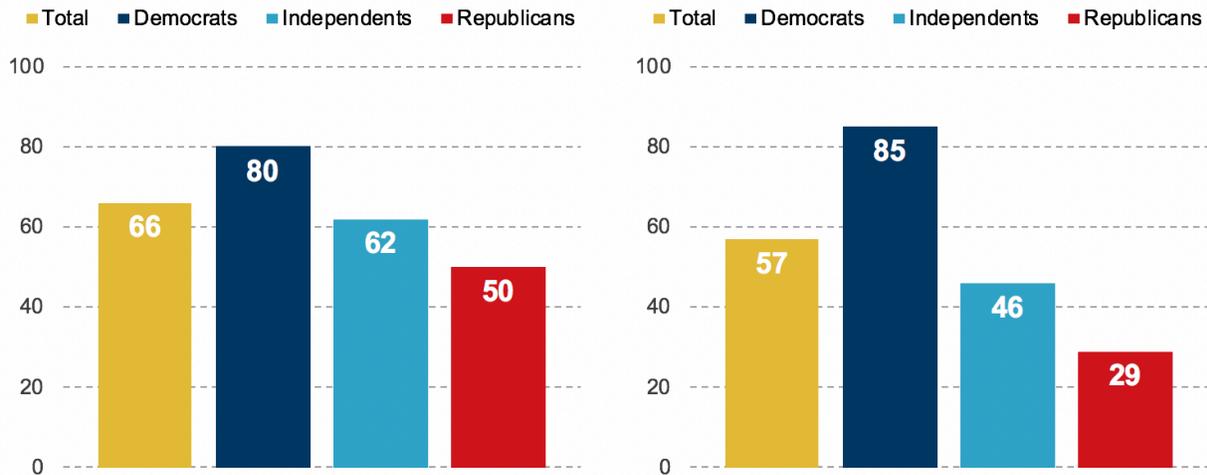
“THESE POLARIZED RESULTS SUGGEST THAT THE MEDIA AND OTHERS WHO WISH TO BUILD THE CASE TO DEFEND THE PRESS BEST LEAVE PRESIDENT TRUMP OUT OF THIS PARTICULAR APPEAL.”

FIGURE 9: INVOKING TRUMP LOSES REPUBLICANS, INDEPENDENTS

SPLIT SAMPLE: Each statement asked to half the sample. Percent that find it a very or somewhat convincing to defend freedom of the press.

Corrupt politicians are trying to muzzle the media and free press to distract voters and keep people from learning the truth. We need the press to stand up to them.

President Trump and others are trying to muzzle the media and free press to distract voters and keep people from learning the truth. We need the press to stand up to him.



To effectively advocate across the political spectrum for protection of a free press, President Trump simply must be left aside. His mention polarizes focus groups participants immediately; both sides see him very differently. For right-leaning participants, he is holding the media to task and they are being unfair.

One Kansas City participant says: “I think he’s trying to get them to be more honest; if they told the truth, he wouldn’t have a problem.” Another: “I think he’s just trying to get even footing. Most [media] are anti-Trump 24-7. They are looking for one sound bite to play out of context. If I was in that position, it would tick me off too.” In order to talk to these types of voters, President Trump cannot be a part of the larger press freedom conversation.

4. BUILD CONNECTIONS WITH CONSERVATIVE AUDIENCES

Democrats have many complaints about the news media, in particular around the business of news and putting clicks and views ahead of informing the public. But Democrats are largely more trusting and less susceptible to anti-news media arguments.

Republicans’ doubts are more driven by a perception of political bias, and partially as a result, they are less trusting of the news media and more open

to anti-press sentiment. While an overall plurality of voters believes calling for boos and other actions against journalists is never justified, a majority of Republicans, 52 percent, believe that politicians engaging in this behavior are just reflecting public frustrations. This question, obviously, is a long way from violence toward journalists at rallies and in other occasions, but it highlights the consequences of a deteriorating view of the press.

To reach voters who have lost trust, it is important to show that treatment of the press isn't a Trump issue, but rather a serious deterioration of the ability of the press to inform. The survey data points to three key target Republican groups that may be most fertile to this message:

- **Conservative press defenders (8% of voters, 19% of Republicans):** Republicans who believe a free press is very important, think boos or actions against journalists are never justified, and say politicians attacking the media have gone too far.
- **Conservatives who approve of Trump coverage (11% of voters, 26% of Republicans):** Republicans who approve of media coverage of Trump.
- **Conservatives skeptical of Trump's behavior (13% of voters, 31% of Republicans):** Republicans who disapprove of the way Trump is treating the media.

Compared to Republicans overall, these allies are far more convinced by the given reasons to defend freedom of the press, particularly when it comes to serving as a watchdog as well as keeping journalists safe from retribution and letting them do their job even when the coverage is unfavorable.

The above three groups tend to be more moderate Republicans than overall: while 42 percent of all Republicans define themselves as strong partisans, fewer of these allies self-identify as strong Republicans.

The three groups are all made of slightly more educated Republicans, with Republicans skeptical of the president's behavior as the most upscale (over half have a college education, and more than one-fifth have a household income of over \$100,000 per year).

FIGURE 10: CONSERVATIVE ALLIES LESS STRONG PARTISANS

	Total Republicans	Conserv. press defenders	Conserv. approve of critical Trump coverage	Conserv. skeptical of Trump behavior
% total electorate	43	8	11	13
% total Republicans	100	19	26	31
Strong Republican	42	38	35	21
Weak/lean Republican	58	62	66	79
Male	55	60	51	50
White	87	89	83	88
College graduate	36	43	39	47
Over \$100k income	19	21	19	22

5. USE THE FACTS

Concerns about the press — political agenda, sensationalism, and the influence of money — make the news media a target for many politicians. Yet most voters do not see the press as under threat⁸. A majority, 52 percent, rates the level of threat as 5 or lower on a 0 to 10 scale. And just 28 percent rate the level of threat as 8 or higher, denoting a major threat.

52%

RATES THE LEVEL OF THREAT AS 5 OR LOWER ON A 0-10 SCALE

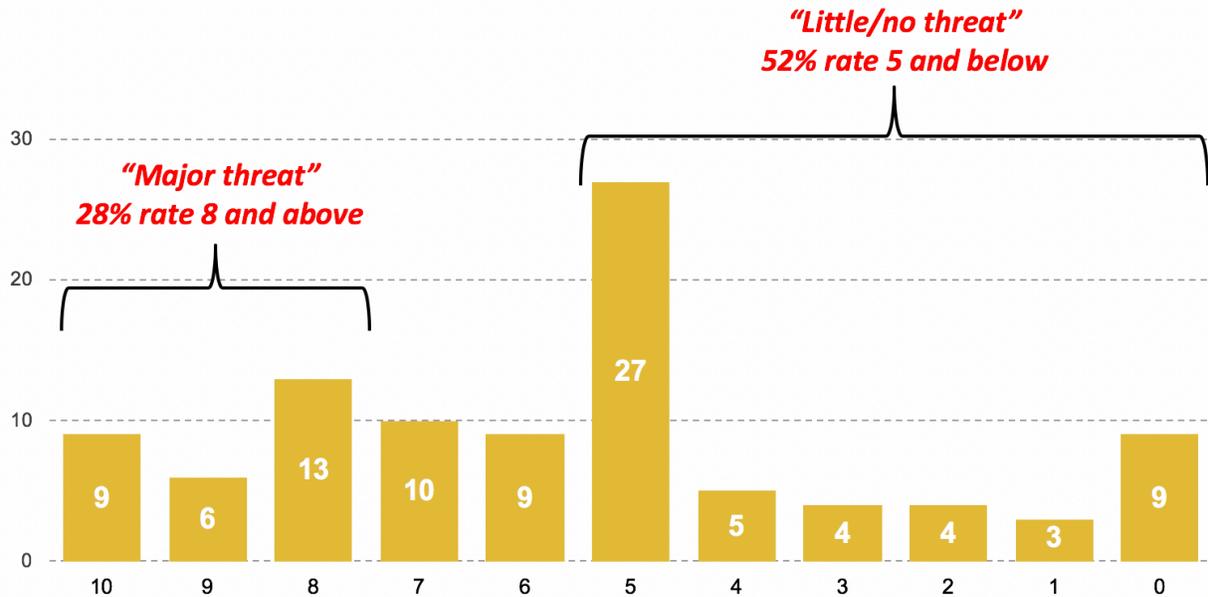
28%

RATES THE LEVEL OF THREAT AS 8 OR HIGHER ON A 0-10 SCALE

⁸ The survey fielded before the shooting that killed five Capital Gazette employees in Annapolis.

FIGURE 11: MOST DO NOT SEE PRESS UNDER THREAT

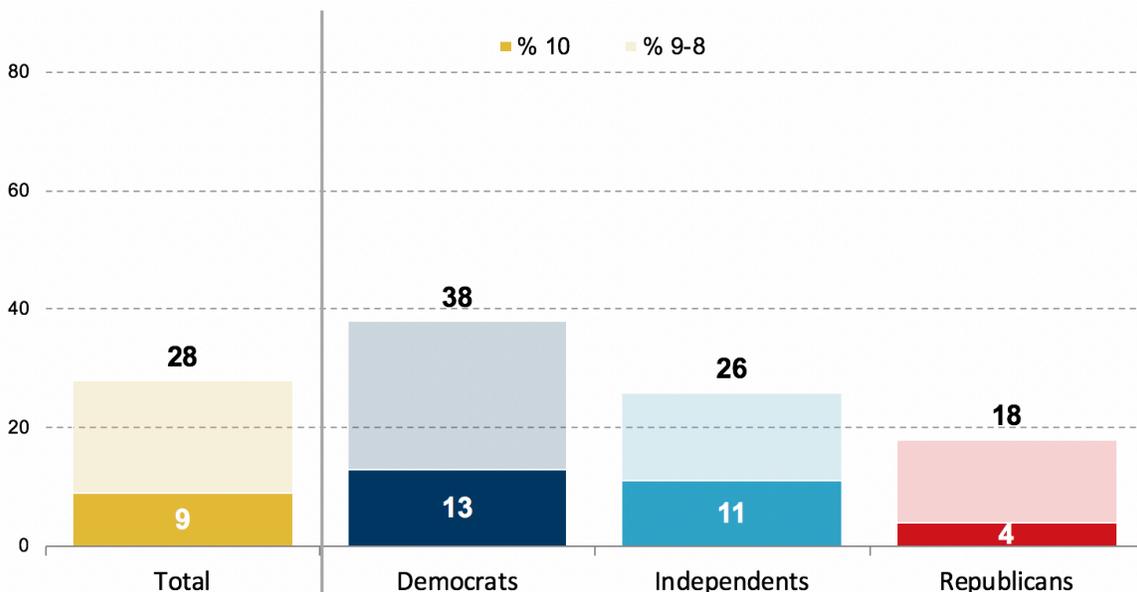
On a scale from 0 to 10, please rate the current level of threat against the press, where 10 means an incredibly urgent threat, 0 means no threat at all, and 5 is somewhere in the middle.



As with much else, voters see the potential threat to the press through a partisan lens: 38 percent of Democrats think the press is under major threat, compared to just 18 percent of Republicans; a 20-point gap. Independents fall somewhat in between.

FIGURE 12: THREAT SEEN THROUGH PARTISAN LENS

On a scale from 0 to 10, please rate the current level of threat against the press, where 10 means an incredibly urgent threat, 0 means no threat at all, and 5 is somewhere in the middle.



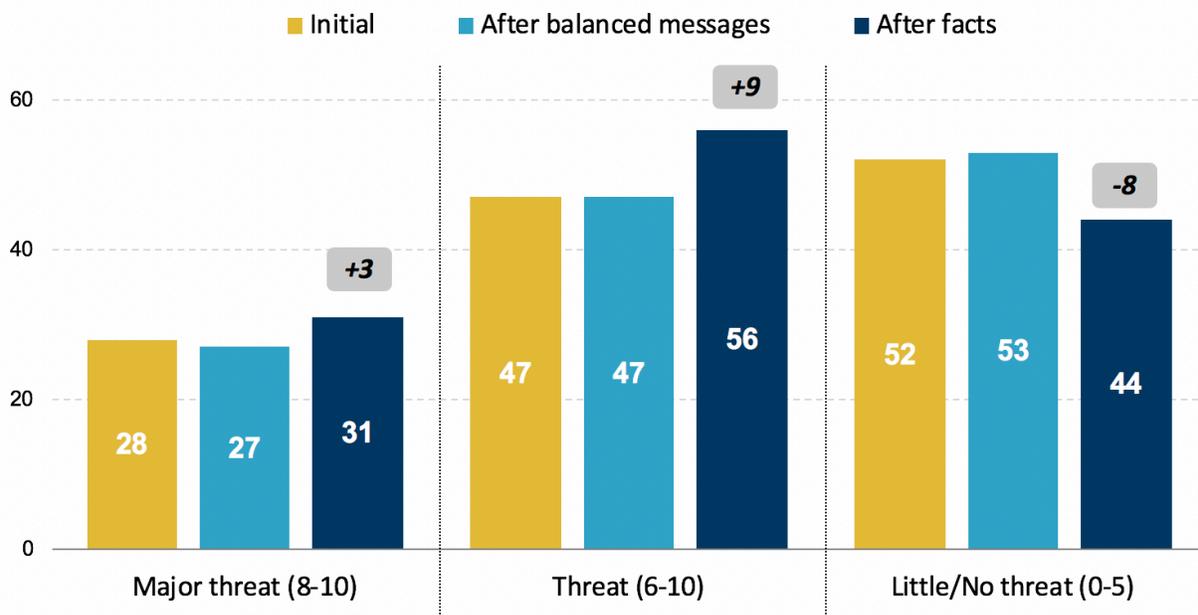
The lack of urgency around the threat against the press is a major finding from the research — and indicates an uphill battle in terms of mobilizing the public to support the media. And while a slim majority overall see little or no threat against the press, this is even stronger among Republicans (66 percent no threat) and Independents (56 percent no threat).

Yet there is some hope. Introducing facts about the threat journalists currently face shifts voters' view and impacts the urgency with which voters see the situation. In an experiment in the survey, half of the sample was primed with a set of facts about attacks on the press. Respondents assessed the threat to the press before and after they heard these facts. The other half of the sample assessed the threat before and after balanced messaging.

Simply hearing balanced messages without the facts produced no real shift in perceived threat. But after hearing facts, there was a nine-point increase in perception of a threat against the press.

FIGURE 13: THOSE WHO HEAR FACTS ABOUT VIOLENCE SHIFT TOWARD HIGHER THREAT LEVEL

On a scale from 0 to 10, please rate the current level of threat against the press, where 10 means an incredibly urgent threat, 0 means no threat at all, and 5 is somewhere in the middle.



The dynamic plays across party lines, and hearing the facts actually prevents Republicans from *shifting away* from perceiving a threat to the press after we present both sides. After balanced messaging, the share of Republicans who report a threat falls from 33 to 25 percent. But those who hear details of the threat stay steady, from 33 to 35 percent.

FIGURE 14: FACTS PRODUCE SHIFTS IN KEY TARGETS, AND FACTS KEEP REPUBLICANS FROM SLIPPING AFTER HEARING NEGATIVES⁹

Total threat (6-10)	Initial	After balanced messages	After facts	Shift after facts
Total	47	47	56	+9
Democrat	61	67	78	+17
Independent	43	49	46	+3
Republican	33	25	35	+2
Initial "little/no threat" (0-5)	0	17	34	+34
Conserv. approve critical Trump coverage	49	48	57	+8
Conserv. skeptical of Trump	40	43	58	+18

6. PROMOTE ACCOUNTABILITY

The most important thing the media can do to show they are a credible source is to acknowledge when they make mistakes and issue corrections. This action receives strong, bipartisan support from virtually equal shares of Democrats and Republicans, and key conservative allies.

“THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THE MEDIA CAN DO TO SHOW THEY ARE A CREDIBLE SOURCE IS TO ACKNOWLEDGE WHEN THEY MAKE MISTAKES AND ISSUE CORRECTIONS.”

⁹ Margins of error on the half samples for these sub-groups is somewhat higher, but shifts significant.

FIGURE 15: CORRECTIONS IMPORTANT ACROSS PARTY AND FOR KEY TARGETS

%8-10	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep	Little/no threat	Conserv. press defenders	Conserv. approve of critical Trump coverage	Conserv. Trump skeptical
Acknowledge mistakes	70	70	64	71	67	85	57	72
Label reporting versus opinion	57	52	60	62	55	76	56	60
Editorial balance	45	40	40	52	43	63	41	52
Balanced # of pos/neg stories on government	43	36	37	53	45	49	38	50
More positive stories	40	39	40	40	38	36	35	41
Balanced # of pos/neg stories on Trump	37	26	35	50	38	34	28	36
Take behind the scenes	32	34	25	32	31	31	33	33
Info on journalists	31	29	31	34	30	38	27	31

Focus group participants complain that the press moves so fast, gets things wrong, and never bothers to go back. There is a sense that people are looking for real humility from the press, both in terms of how they deliver the news and inform, and in how they acknowledge any shortcomings or mistakes.

In focus groups, many acknowledge the reality of 24-hour news reporting, but also are greatly bothered by outlets not issuing corrections or being held accountable to facts. As a man in Orlando says: “CNN has had some retractions, Fox has had retractions... they have a right to pick their stories, they have a right, but who is holding them responsible? I’m in the middle here trying to decide what is right and wrong.”

“THERE IS A SENSE THAT PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR REAL HUMILITY FROM THE PRESS, BOTH IN TERMS OF HOW THEY DELIVER THE NEWS AND INFORM, AND IN HOW THEY ACKNOWLEDGE ANY SHORTCOMINGS OR MISTAKES.”

APPENDIX A: MEDIA SOURCES

The media environment is largely fractured, and voters consume news from a variety of sources. More voters turn to and trust local news (which many see as less ideological and more factual) over the national outlets. Sixty-eight percent of registered voters report to watch local TV news at least weekly; 50 percent say they read their local newspaper at least once a week.

About half of voters report watching national broadcast news at least once a week, and approximately a third say they watch cable news like CNN or Fox News weekly. There are stark partisan differences in these media habits. About half (51 percent) of Republicans report watching Fox News weekly, while just 22 of Democrats and 21 percent of Independents do. Forty percent of Democrats say they watch CNN each week, compared to 16 and 19 percent of Independents and Republicans, respectively.

FIGURE 16: NEWS SOURCES

% get news daily/weekly	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep	Under 30	30-49	50+	Non-coll	College
Local TV	68	67	57	71	49	58	80	68	66
Local newspaper	50	52	39	50	32	42	61	47	54
National broadcast	49	56	39	43	35	38	62	49	49
News on Facebook	40	43	34	38	59	49	28	43	37
Fox News	34	22	21	51	27	29	41	38	28
Talk Radio	32	28	26	39	30	34	32	32	33
CNN	29	40	16	19	27	29	29	28	30
Yahoo news	24	26	20	23	21	28	23	23	26
National newspapers	23	28	20	17	26	23	21	17	32
NPR	23	29	28	17	24	24	22	19	29
MSNBC	22	32	11	13	16	19	26	22	22
Twitter	15	18	8	14	28	19	8	15	15
Huffington Post	13	19	8	8	17	17	9	12	15
Breitbart News	5	3	3	8	5	6	4	5	4

Voters are increasingly turning to Facebook for news, and news from Facebook now tops cable outlets like Fox News and CNN. Forty percent of voters say they get their news from the platform at least weekly, including 59 percent of those under 30, and 49 percent between the ages of 30 and 50. Women report to use Facebook for news more often: 48 percent of women are on it multiple times per week, compared to 31 percent of men.

Trust in national print and broadcast news carries a partisan difference, and cable news is even more polarized. Seventy-four percent of Democrats have a great deal or some trust in CNN, compared to only 35 percent of Independents and 31 percent of Republicans; 65 percent of Republicans have a great deal or some trust in Fox News, compared to 33 percent of Independents and 28 percent of Democrats.

FIGURE 17: TRUST ACROSS OUTLETS

% trust great deal + somewhat	Total	Dem	Ind	Rep	Under 30	30-49	50+	Non-college	College grad
Local TV news	74	82	63	67	62	72	80	74	75
Local newspaper	68	76	53	62	66	65	71	66	70
National broadcast	62	78	47	47	56	59	65	58	68
National newspaper	52	69	40	36	57	54	49	46	62
CNN	52	74	35	31	50	53	52	50	55
NPR	47	61	42	34	47	50	46	41	58
MSNBC	45	64	30	29	44	48	44	42	50
Fox News	44	28	33	65	40	42	48	49	37
Talk radio	39	36	25	45	38	41	37	40	37
Yahoo News	34	41	23	28	36	39	30	32	36
Huffington Post	33	48	19	19	37	37	29	30	39
Facebook	26	30	17	24	37	31	19	39	22
Twitter	18	21	8	16	28	23	11	20	15
Breitbart	14	9	12	19	15	14	13	15	12

Four in ten access Facebook for news at least weekly, but only about a quarter of voters say they have trust in Facebook's news offering. This number is slightly higher among Democrats, women, young people, and those with lower incomes.

FIGURE 18: YOUNGER, MORE DOWNSCALE GET NEWS FROM FACEBOOK

	Get news from Facebook	Trust news from Facebook
Total	40	26
Democrat	43	30
Independent	34	17
Republican	38	24
Men	31	22
Women	48	29
Under 30	59	37
30-49	49	31
50+	28	19
Non-college grad	43	29
College grad	37	22
Income under \$50k	46	33
Income over \$50k	37	22

Voters are somewhat split on the role that platforms like Facebook should play in the delivery of news and their responsibilities to evaluate sources. A plurality of voters think online platforms should play a role in stopping misleading information and news stories, but more than a third say platforms like Facebook and Google cannot be expected to vet all stories.

Focus group participants voice concern around letting these platforms “decide” what is and is not legitimate news. Some speak of “Facebook jail” and note that Facebook seems quicker to shut down those on the right over those from the left. As one woman in Kansas City says: “Most of my family kind of leans more to the right, and a few of us have gotten Facebook jail for our posts. I know I have some friends that are definitely super liberal, and they can say whatever and have no issues... So, it should be centered but it's not.”

APPENDIX B: MEDIA DOUBTS AND FACTS

FULL TEXT OF MEDIA DOUBTS

Beholden to business and money. The media is controlled by just a handful of companies and powerful owners, and they each have a political agenda. The media can't cover news accurately when beholden to large business and money.

Mouthpiece of owners. Too many news outlets do not adhere to journalistic standards and are just mouthpieces for wealthy activist donors and owners.

Only goal is ad revenue. The media's only goal is ad revenue and getting you to click on their stories. They care more about creating controversy and drama than they do about reporting the truth.

24-hour news cycle and fact-checking. The 24-hour news cycle promotes bad behavior in journalists. They don't check their sources, and run stories before they can confirm.

Enabled Trump in 2016. The media enabled Donald Trump in the last election. They gave him millions of dollars' worth of free on-air time, and they focused too much on Hillary's emails.

Run by the elites. The media is concentrated on the coasts and run by the elites. They don't care what goes on with average people and don't understand our lives and concerns.

Does not want to see the President succeed. Rather than covering the good things he does, they are focused on negative stories and “gotcha” journalism. They are holding back progress.

Create stories that are not true. The media routinely create and promote stories that just are not true.

FACTS INTRODUCED

Journalists, especially female journalists, report being harassed and threatened online.

President Trump has encouraged the crowds at his rallies to boo reporters, and some people have spit or thrown things at the press.

President Trump has retweeted several images suggesting physical violence against the press.

A Congressman in Montana recently pled guilty to assault for body-slammng a reporter.

President Trump has called journalists the, quote, opposition party, and an enemy of the people.

In 2017, over 30 journalists have been arrested while reporting in the U.S.

