



## Research Memo

Americans' Use of Media and Technology,  
and their views on  
Online Safety, Privacy, Content Moderation, and  
Independent News

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Research Completed by

**AFRICAN AMERICAN**  
RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

★ BSP ★  
RESEARCH

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## Background and Methodology

On behalf of Free Press, the African American Research Collaborative (AARC) and BSP Research (BSP) completed a survey of 3,000 American adults to better understand how Americans use media and technology to gain information, how they deal with misinformation and safety online, what privacy concerns they have about online platforms, what they believe are appropriate roles in content moderation, and whether they perceive a need for more independent news sources in the current media and political environment.

The poll followed four focus groups that helped the researchers and Free Press observe how Americans think about and discuss the use of modern communications technologies. There was one focus group each of Black women, young Midwesterners, parents of color of young teens, and Spanish speaking Latinos from California. The qualitative research helped inform questions asked in the survey, as did expertise provided by staff from Free Press, AARC, and BSP.

The poll sampled White (n=750), African American (n=750), Latino (n=750), and AAPI respondents (n=750). Post stratification weights were implemented using a raking algorithm to balance the sample to US Census data. The blended phone and online poll was in the field from March 1 to March 18, 2024. It has a margin of error of +/- 1.8% for the full sample, and of +/- 3.6% for the Black, Latino, AAPI, and White samples.

## Key Findings Summary

Clicking on any of the section headers in this summary will allow the reader to jump to that section in the document.

### [Americans' Use of Media and Technology](#)

1. More than half of respondents spend 3 or more hours a day on their phone, with major time spent perusing Facebook, news, entertaining videos on YouTube, and answering work emails, texting, and making phone calls.
2. More than half of respondents acknowledge that they watch television at least 3 hours a day.

### [Misinformation, Privacy and Safety](#)

3. Americans are concerned that what they see online can be false or intended to confuse. They have become fact checkers and support legislation to educate kids to fact check online content.
4. One third of respondents have been the victim of a data breach, computer virus, hack, or scam; while one in five indicate they have been a victim of identity theft.
5. One third of Americans indicate they or someone they know has been bullied online; likely one reason 7 in 10 parents keep an eye on the online activities of their children.

6. Americans have significant privacy concerns, with two thirds concerned that: tech companies or the government are tracking their online actions; their search history is being used to target personalized ads; and tech companies might sell their personal information for marketing purposes.

### Moderation, Racism and Politics

7. By two to one, respondents believe that internet companies should not be forced by the government to share political content on their platforms.
8. Majorities of Americans believe social media companies should be able to moderate against hateful or racist speech, even when that speech is part of a political ad.
9. Americans do not want social media companies to sell their data to political campaigns or to profit from running political ads that contain purposely false information.

### Public Need and Support for Independent News

10. Many Americans do not believe they have access to enough independent news sources to facilitate their full participation in elections.
11. Just over half of Americans agree that more independent news outlets are needed for a healthy democracy and to stop disinformation.
12. Six in ten respondents agree funding should be increased to build diversity in who owns and operates independent news sources.
13. Most respondents believe newspapers should acknowledge racial bias in their historic news coverage.

## Findings in Detail

### Americans' Use of Media and Technology

**More than half of respondents spend 3 or more hours a day on their phone, with major time spent perusing Facebook, news, entertaining videos on YouTube, and answering work emails, texting, and making phone calls.** We asked how much time respondents spent on their smartphone in an average day. The most common answer was 3 to 4 hours at 28% but 36% of respondents spend more than 4 hours on their phone every day. 35% indicated that they spend 2 hours or less on their phone. Age has some impact on smartphone use, with half of those 50 and over indicating that they use their smartphone 2 hours or less, while only 19% of those age 18 to 29, 20% of those age 30 to 39 and 31% of those age 40 to 49 use their phone 2 hours or less per day. Race and ethnicity also demonstrate some variance with Latino and Black respondents more likely to indicate they are heavy daily users of cellphones. 33% of White and 31% of AAPI respondents indicate they spend 5 or more hours a day on their phone, while 44% of Latino and 43% of Black respondents do so.

We then asked about how much time respondents used their smartphone for different types of activities. More than 50% of respondents indicated that they used 16 minutes or more of their daily cellphone time to check social media, read news stories, watch humorous videos on YouTube, or answer work emails, text or make phone calls (one answer). Respondents acknowledge using their phone for 16 or more minutes to check social media (55%), read news stories (52%), or watch entertaining or humorous videos on YouTube (57%). 66% use their phone 16 or more minutes a day to answer work emails, text or make phone calls.

Race/ethnicity and age have implications for use of social media. While 41% of White and 44% of AAPI respondents indicate that they check social media pages for 31 or more minutes every day, 55% of Latino and 52% of African Americans do so. Similarly, while 30% of those age 50 and over check social media 31 or more minutes a day, 45% of those ages 40-49, 61% of those 30 to 39, and 64% of those ages 18 to 29 do so.

**More than half of respondents acknowledge that they watch television at least 3 hours a day.** Television, whether over cable or streamed, remains a popular part of Americans' days. We asked on an average day, when they are not on their smartphone "how much time do you spend streaming or watching traditional television, including broadcast, cable, or streaming." 56% of respondents indicated that they watch 3 or more hours of television. But this varies significantly by age, with older respondents watching more television. While 41% of those ages 18 to 29 watch 3 or more hours of television, this jumps to 56% of those 30 to 39, 58% of those 40 to 49, and 61% of those 50 and older.

## Misinformation, Privacy and Safety

**Americans are concerned that what they see online can be false or intended to confuse. They have become fact checkers and support legislation to educate kids to fact check online content.** Almost 8 in 10 respondents are somewhat (44%) or very (34%) concerned that the information they are seeing online is "false, fake, or a deliberate attempt to confuse people." Similarly, 36% are somewhat 47% or very concerned that people under the age of 18 "may be getting exposed to fake or false information" online. Parents of children under 18 as well as those without kids under 18 share this concern at similar levels.

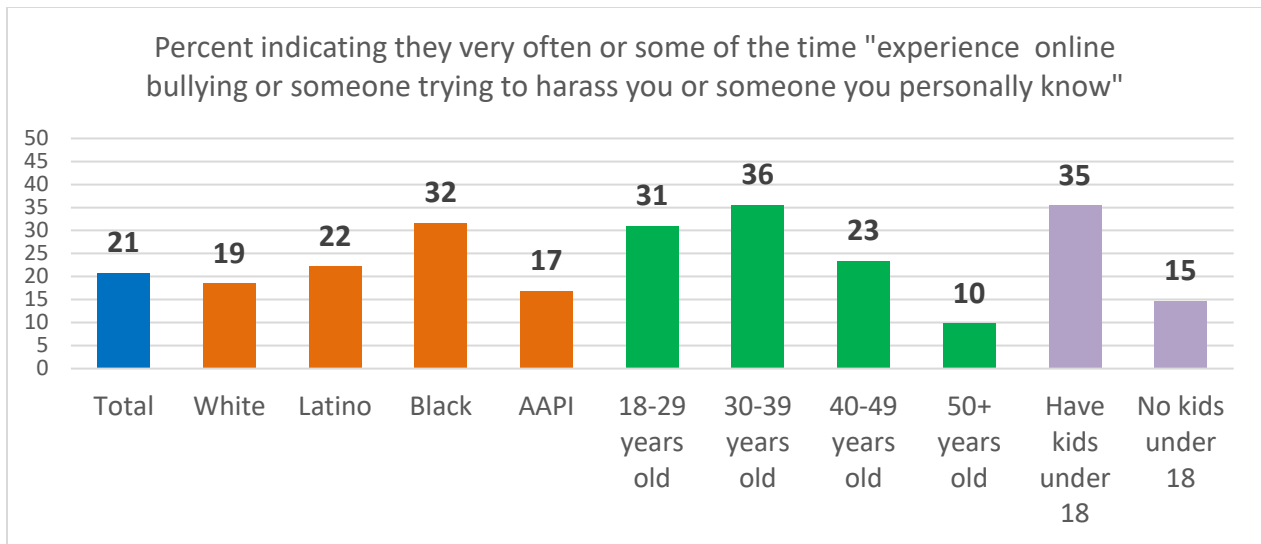
Consistent with what we heard in focus groups, Americans recognize the need to fact check information they see online. 82% do at least some fact checking with 27% of respondents indicating they very often "search and look up information to fact check something you read or heard [online]," 34% of respondents fact checking some of the time, and 21% occasionally fact checking. Education appears to have some impact on fact checking with 33% of those with a four-year college degree indicating that they fact check very often, but only 20% of those with a high school degree or less fact checking very often.

71% of respondents answer yes, they would support “legislation to create new programs in K-12 schools to teach students to think critically about information and news and how to evaluate or research the accuracy of what they see online.” Only 13% answer no and 16% are not sure. This is popular across demographic groups with similar support among Black (72% yes), Latino (72% yes), AAPI (70% yes) and White (70% yes) Americans. 80% of Democrats, 63% of Independents and 67% of Republicans support such legislation, as do 81% of Liberals, 69% of Moderates and 71% of Conservatives. Likely voters (75%) are somewhat more supportive than less likely voters (65%), but all groups indicate strong support for this type of legislation.

**One third of respondents have been the victim of a data breach, computer virus, hack, or scam; while one in five indicate they have been a victim of identity theft.** 37% of respondents indicate that they received a letter from a company that their data had been breached. 38% had their computer hacked or had a virus. 32% have been a victim of a phone or online scam. 19% have been a victim of identity theft. For most of these, there is little variation based on race or ethnicity, though White and AAPI respondents are more likely to say they have been the victim of a data breach than Black or Latino respondents. Those 30 and older are 10 to 14 points more likely to say they have received a letter about a data breach than those 18 to 29 years old, and those with incomes over \$100,000 are 20 points more likely than those with incomes under \$40,000 to have been informed they were the victim of a data breach.

Respondents indicate that scams and identity theft occur pretty consistently across age and race or ethnicity, while young respondents are somewhat more likely to report being the victim of hacking or a virus than older Americans.

**One third of Americans indicate they or someone they know has been bullied online; likely one reason 7 in 10 parents keep an eye on the online activities of their children.** 35% of respondents answered that they have experienced “online bullying or someone trying to harass you or someone you personally know,” either very often (7%), some of the time (14%), or “occasionally, not often” (14%). These numbers are consistent across genders, however young respondents are much more likely than older respondents to indicate bullying happens very often or some of the time. Black respondents are more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to have encountered bullying. And parents of children under 18 are significantly more aware of bullying than those without children under 18.



We asked only parents of children under age 18 whether they “Check to see what your children are reading or watching online.” 72% of parents indicate that they do so very often (39%) or some of the time (33%). 17% indicate they do so occasionally, 5% indicate rarely, and 6% never. There was no variation on race, ethnicity, or education in the percentage answering very often.

**Americans have significant privacy concerns, with two thirds or more concerned that: tech companies or the government are tracking their online actions; their search history is being used to target personalized ads; and tech companies might sell their personal information for marketing purposes.** 72% of respondents are very or somewhat concerned that tech companies are tracking what they read or watch online. 67% are concerned that the United States government is doing so. 76% are concerned their personal information is being collected by foreign governments. 69% are concerned that they are seeing specific personalized ads based on their search and online history, and 78% are concerned tech companies will sell their personal information to other marketing companies.

These concerns are felt broadly across age, race, education, and income, as well as across political ideology and party.

### Moderation, Racism and Politics

**By two to one, respondents believe that internet companies should not be forced by the government to share political content on their platforms.** 68% of Americans prefer “Internet companies should decide what content is on their platforms and not be forced by the government to allow users to share political messages” over “States should be able to require internet companies to include all political content on their platforms” (32%). While preference for internet company independence on the political message front is true across all demographics,

there is some clear variation. Black (76%) and AAPI (73%) preference for independence is higher than White (67%) and Latino (68%) preference. Younger Americans are more supportive of internet company independence on political messaging than older Americans: 18 to 29 (77%), 30-39 (71%), 40-49 (69%), and (64%). While there is solid bipartisan preference for independence, Democrats (74%), Republicans (63%) and Independents (67%) do have some variation in the level of preference.

**Majorities of Americans believe social media companies should be able to moderate against hateful or racist speech, even when that speech is part of a political ad.** We asked whether it is acceptable for social media and tech companies to block content that is considered racist or hateful. 72% of Americans believe it is acceptable for companies to moderate for these purposes, 21% consider this unacceptable, and 7% don't know. There is mildly more support for anti-racism moderation among Black people and higher income respondents. But no demographic group we identified falls below 65% support.

We tested whether it makes a difference to respondents if the purportedly violative speech is part of a political ad. Specifically, we asked whether it is acceptable for social media or tech companies to “Block the distribution of political ads because it violates their terms of use against false information or hate speech.” 58% of Americans believe it is acceptable for companies to block the distribution of ads, 31% consider this unacceptable, and 11% don't know. Moderately higher percentages of African American (63%) and AAPI (64%) respondents find this acceptable compared to Latino (55%) and White (57%) respondents.

While most Americans accept companies being able block political ads for false information or hate speech, the political context does appear to weaken support for company moderation when compared to moderation of racist or hateful speech outside the political context.

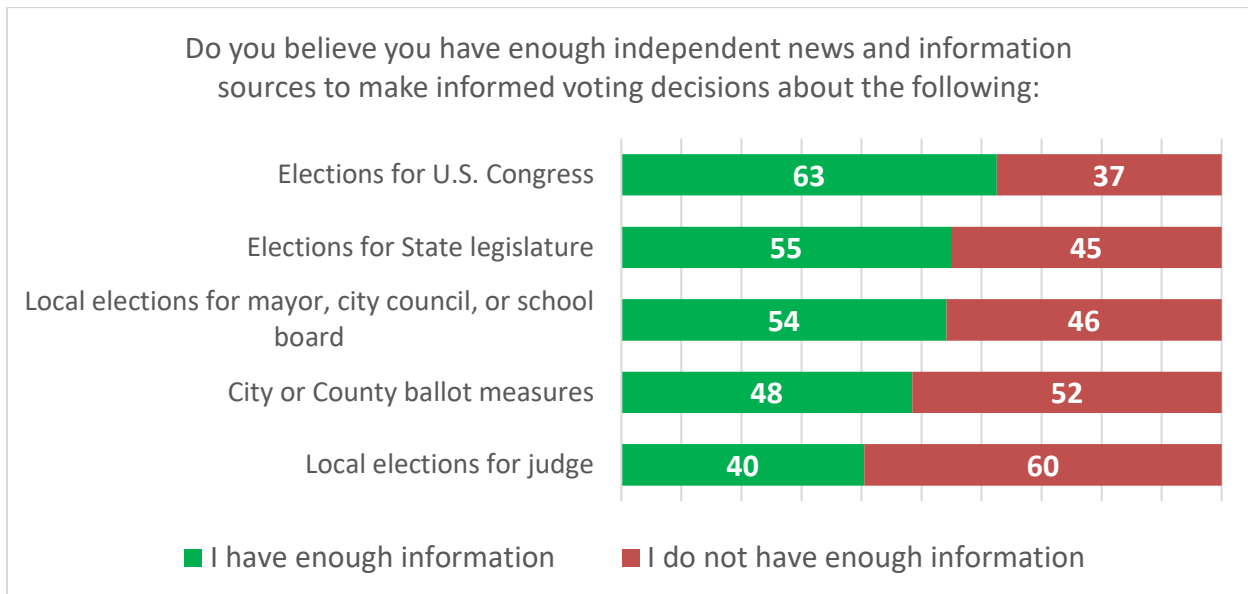
**Americans do not want social media companies to sell their data to political campaigns or to profit from running political ads that contain purposely false information.** We asked whether respondents think it is acceptable unacceptable for social media and tech companies to “sell data about people who use their platform to candidates for their political ads.” 73% of respondents find this unacceptable, while 20% find it acceptable and 7% don't know. There is some variation here based on race or ethnicity with 17% of White and 32% of Black respondents finding this acceptable, while 21% of Latino and 23% of AAPI respondents find this acceptable. Those with kids under 18 (31% acceptable) and those living in cities (32% acceptable) also have higher levels of acceptance than other groups. Lower percentages of respondents without kids under 18 (15% acceptable) and rural respondents (11% acceptable) find this acceptable.

Two thirds of respondents believe it is unacceptable for companies to “Profit from running political ads that contain purposely false information,” with 51% considering this not acceptable at all and 16% finding it not very acceptable. We again see higher levels of acceptance among African American (39% acceptable) respondents, those with kids under 18 (39%), and city

residents (36% acceptable). And again, lower percentages of respondents without kids under 18 (20% acceptable) and rural respondents (16% acceptable) find this acceptable.

## Public Need and Support for Independent News

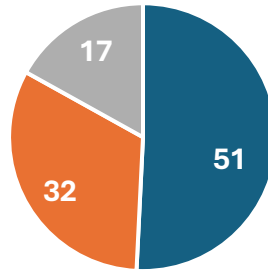
**Many Americans do not believe they have access to enough independent news sources to facilitate their full participation in elections.** We asked “do you believe you have enough independent news and information sources to make informed decisions” about a series of elections at different levels of government. For some local elections, a majority of respondents indicated that they do not have enough independent news to help them make informed voting decisions. For the five types of elections we tested, 37% to 60% of respondents feel they lack sufficient independent news and information sources to make informed voting decisions.



**Just over half of Americans agree that more independent news outlets are needed for a healthy democracy and to stop disinformation.** Respondents lean solidly towards the value in more independent news outlets. However, this is an issue that could benefit from more education as fully 17% indicate they “don’t know.” Just under a third think we already have enough choices in news outlets and more will not create change.



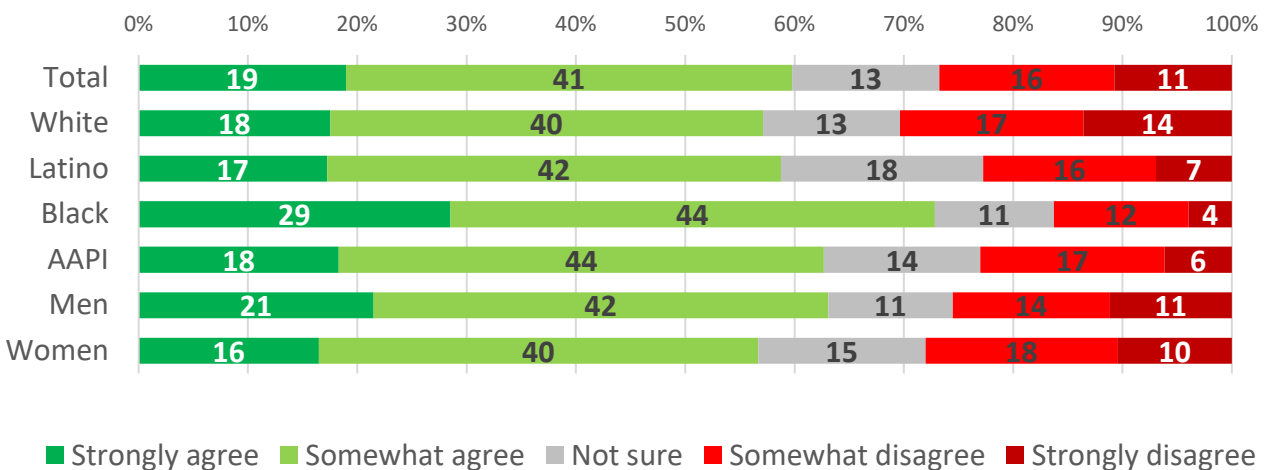
Thinking about independent news outlets, which statement do you agree with more?



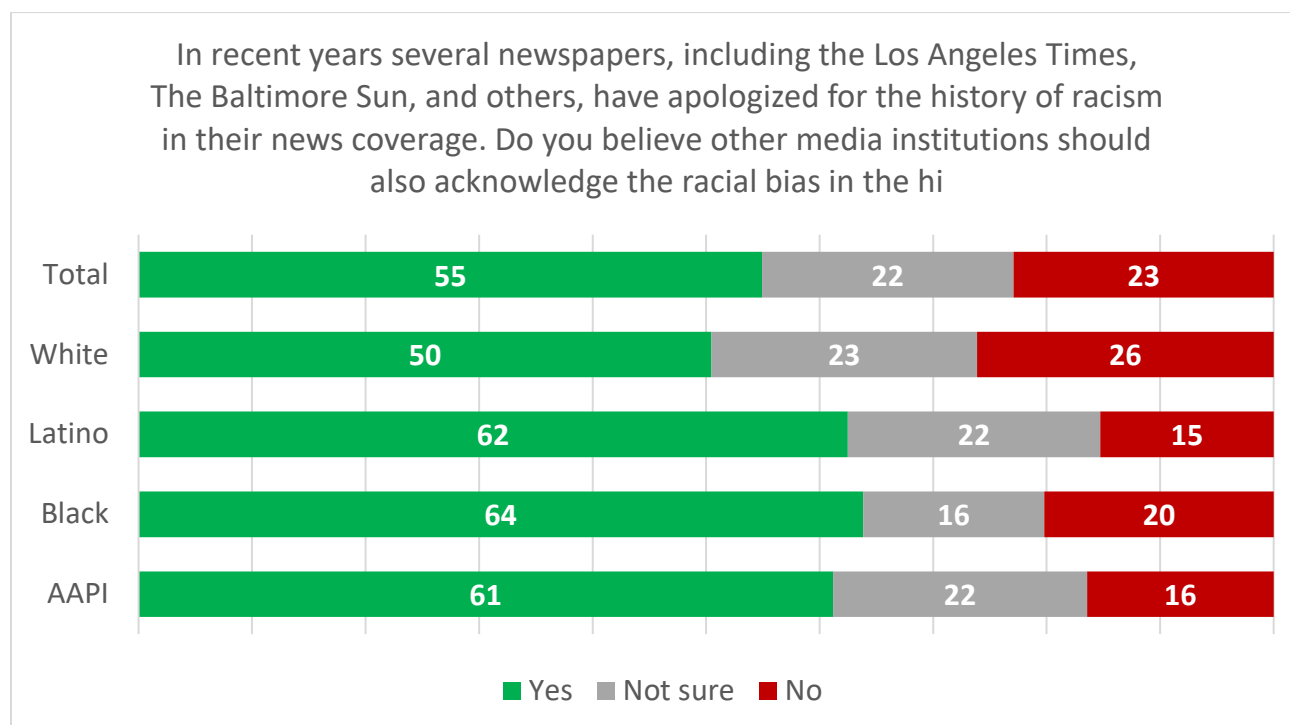
- Having more independent news outlets is important to stopping disinformation and is good for the health of our democracy
- We already have enough choices in news outlets, and creating more news outlets won't change anything
- Don't know

**Six in ten respondents agree funding should be increased to build diversity in who owns and operates independent news sources.** We asked whether respondents agree or disagree with, “Increase funding opportunities so that there is more diversity in who owns and operates independent news and information sources.” Solid majorities of all racial/ethnic groups and both men and women agree on the value of additional support for greater media ownership diversity.

Do you agree or disagree: Increase funding opportunities so that there is more diversity in who owns and operates independent news and information sources



**Most respondents believe newspapers should acknowledge racial bias in their historic news coverage.** We offered respondents the opportunity to answer yes, no, or not sure to the following question: “In recent years several newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times, The Baltimore Sun, and others, have apologized for the history of racism in their news coverage. Do you believe other media institutions should also acknowledge the racial bias in the history of their news coverage?” 55% of respondents answer “yes” to this question, with 22% answering “no,” and 23% unsure. There is some variation by race and ethnicity, with people of color more supportive of apologies than White respondents.



While there is some variation for this question along political ideology and party identification, pluralities of every demographic we tested support newspaper apologies.

	Total	Democrat	Independent/ Other	Republican	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Yes	55	72	49	43	70	56	49
Not sure	22	16	30	22	17	24	19
No	23	12	21	35	13	21	31