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Action

2024 POLL

Poll conducted by BSP Research and
African American Research Collaborative (AARC)

PUBLIC-OPINION POLL: AMERICANS' VIEWS ON MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY & DEMOCRACY

As distrust in mainstream media rises and local journalism continues to collapse, people are increasingly turning to social media for information and finding disinformation instead. In light of these trends, Free Press conducted a public-opinion poll to understand people's beliefs about media, tech and democracy.

In short, Americans believe the current media and tech ecosystem is not meeting civic-information needs or supporting a just and multiracial democracy. At the same time, there are high levels of concern about the twin problems of dwindling local news and the prevalence of false information online. A majority believes that more independent news outlets could safeguard against disinformation and benefit the health of our democracy. People's beliefs about media and tech point to the urgent need for continued engagement and policy reform to advance accountability in these fields.

NEWS CONSUMPTION

Americans want more local news. A majority use social media to access news.

- 3 in 4 Americans access news on radio and television on a weekly basis, while over 50% use Facebook and YouTube to access news on a weekly basis.
- Black and Latino people are more likely to access news on Facebook and YouTube and more likely to share and engage with social-media content than white and AAPI people.
- 69% of Black respondents and 62% of Latino respondents say they frequently access information focused on the Black or Latino experience when they search for news.

CONCERNS ABOUT HOW MEDIA & TECHNOLOGY ARE IMPACTING DEMOCRACY

A vast majority of Americans are concerned about online disinformation. Only 1 in 4 feel “very informed” about local elections. Black adults are more likely to report seeing false information online.

- 79% of Americans are concerned that the information they see online is fake, false or a deliberate attempt to confuse people. 76% are concerned about 2024 presidential-election misinformation.
- Only 28% feel “very informed” about local elections. 44% feel “somewhat informed.” The more local the election, the fewer people believe they have enough information to make informed decisions. AAPI people and Latinos are less likely to report feeling informed about local elections.
- 47% of Americans say they often or sometimes encounter news stories they believe contain false information.
- 35% of Americans have experienced online bullying or harassment. 32% of Black people report that this happens often or sometimes (compared to 22% of Latinos, 18% of white people and 17% of AAPI people).

BROAD SUPPORT FOR MORE ACCOUNTABILITY FROM SOCIAL-MEDIA COMPANIES

A vast majority want social-media companies to be more accountable to their users and to reduce hate and misinformation.

- 71% of Americans say social-media companies should limit false and fake information about elections that could be considered anti-democratic.
- 66% say social-media companies should not profit from political ads containing purposefully fake information.
- 58% say social-media companies should block political ads with false information or hate.
- 72% across the political spectrum say social-media companies should block content that’s racist or otherwise hateful.

COMMON GROUND FOR IMPROVING LOCAL NEWS

A majority believe in increased public funding for local news, particularly to support more diversity in sources.

- 52% of Americans support increased public funding to expand local and independent news. Black people (62%) are more likely to support public funding than white people (50%).
- 60% believe that we should “increase funding opportunities so that there is more diversity in who owns and operates independent news and information sources.”
- 55% believe that media institutions should acknowledge the racial bias in the history of their news coverage. Black (64%), Latino (62%), and AAPI people (61%) are more likely than white people (50%) to support this kind of acknowledgment. Liberals (70%) are more likely than conservatives (49%) and moderates (56%) to support acknowledging racial bias.

OVERWHELMING CONCERN ABOUT TECH, SURVEILLANCE & INTERNET ACCESS

Overwhelming percentages of Americans worry about data privacy. Cost remains a barrier to internet access.

- 72% of Americans are concerned about tech companies tracking them online. 78% are concerned about tech companies selling their data to marketing companies.
- 66% are concerned that state and federal governments can access our data to determine our location and use it against us.
- 81% have heard of artificial intelligence (AI), and over 50% of respondents think we need more regulation of AI.
- 26% of respondents overall and 33% of Latino respondents said they'd have to cancel home-internet service if their bills increased \$20 per month.
- A significant portion of Americans report being victims of data breaches (37%), identity theft (19%), computer or device hacks (38%) or a phone or online scam (32%).