



CIVIC DATA & RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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# NEWS CONSUMPTION PATTERNS AMONG AMERICANS IN 2025:

## PLATFORMS, FORMATS, GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES, AND TRUST DYNAMICS

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**CIVIC DATA & RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

A Nonpartisan Research Organization

### ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Civic Data & Research Institute is a nonpartisan research organization dedicated to data-driven analysis and public education on civic and public policy issues affecting the general public. This report examines contemporary patterns in news consumption among U.S. adults, drawing primarily on surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center and Gallup in 2025. It analyzes dominant platforms, preferred formats, generational variations, trust in media sources, and broader implications for civic information flows in a digital media ecosystem.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### DIGITAL DOMINANCE

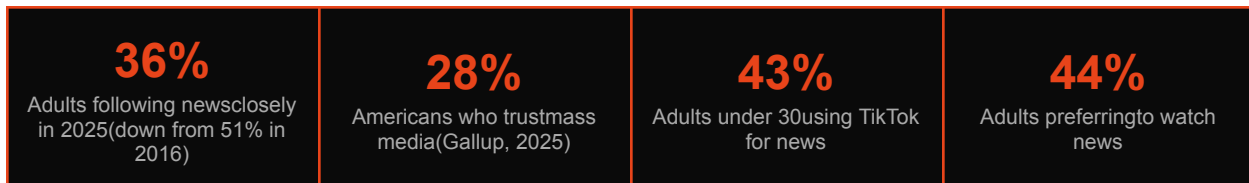
In 2025, American news consumption is characterized by digital dominance, platform fragmentation, and significant generational divides. Social media serves as a regular news source for a substantial portion of adults, with Facebook and YouTube each cited by 38% as frequent platforms, while TikTok has seen remarkable growth, reaching 20% of adults overall and 43% of those under 30. Television retains relevance, particularly among older cohorts, with 32% often obtaining news through it.

### FORMAT PREFERENCES

Preferred formats favor visual content, with 44% of adults expressing a preference for watching news over reading or listening. Overall engagement has declined, with only 36% following news closely in 2025, down from 51% in 2016.

### TRUST EROSION

Trust in mass media stands at historic lows, with Gallup reporting 28% confidence and Pew noting 56% trust in national news organizations — a drop of 11 points since early 2025. These trends underscore challenges to shared civic discourse, including risks of misinformation and polarization, while highlighting opportunities for adaptive journalism in engaging younger audiences.



SECTION 1

## INTRODUCTION

The evolution of media technologies has profoundly reshaped how individuals access and engage with news, transitioning from traditional broadcast and print models to multifaceted digital ecosystems. In 2025, this landscape features algorithmic curation, short-form video content, and incidental exposure, complicating the role of journalism in democratic societies.

This analysis synthesizes findings from Pew Research Center surveys — including waves from August and September 2025 — and Gallup's media trust tracking. Key dimensions examined include platform utilization, format preferences, age-based disparities, trust erosion, and emergent patterns such as influencer reliance. By contextualizing these data, the report illuminates implications for information equity and public deliberation.

The broader context situating this report is one of heightened concern about the integrity of information flows in democratic societies. As news consumption patterns shift, the mechanisms through which citizens develop shared

understanding of political and civic affairs are fundamentally altered. The fragmentation of media consumption carries implications not only for individual information quality but also for collective deliberative capacity — a cornerstone of functioning democracies.

**SECTION 2**

## DECLINING INTENSITY OF NEWS ENGAGEMENT

A notable trend is the reduction in active news-following. Pew data indicate that 36% of U.S. adults follow news all or most of the time in 2025, representing a substantial decline from 51% in 2016. This attenuation spans political affiliations and demographics, though it is more pronounced among younger individuals.

Incidental exposure partially offsets intentional seeking, with many individuals encountering news unexpectedly via algorithms or social feeds rather than through deliberate acts of seeking information. While this ensures some continued exposure to current events, incidental consumption is associated with lower retention, reduced contextual understanding, and increased susceptibility to misleading framing.

Researchers have proposed multiple explanatory frameworks for declining engagement. Attribution to news fatigue — the cumulative effect of prolonged exposure to negative or emotionally taxing reporting — is prominent in the literature. Simultaneously, structural factors such as the erosion of local journalism, the proliferation of information sources, and declining institutional trust create an environment in which sustained news engagement is cognitively demanding and emotionally costly.

**TABLE 1: News Engagement Trend (2016–2025)**

Year	Adults Following News Closely (%)	Change from Prior Period
2016	51%	—
2018	47%	-4 pts
2020	45%	-2 pts
2022	41%	-4 pts
2024	38%	-3 pts
2025	36%	-2 pts

Source: Pew Research Center, 2025. 2018–2024 values are estimated trend data.

**SECTION 3**

## DOMINANT PLATFORMS AND DIGITAL PATHWAYS

Digital devices constitute the primary conduit through which Americans access news in 2025, with high proportions utilizing smartphones, tablets, or computers as their first point of contact. Television persists as a significant source, used often by 32% of adults for news consumption. This dual structure — digital and broadcast — reflects a generational transition still in progress rather than a completed paradigm shift.

Social media's integration into daily news routines is evident and deepening, with 53–54% of adults obtaining news there at least occasionally. The leading platforms include Facebook and YouTube, each cited by 38% of adults as regular news sources, followed by emerging platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter). The rise of TikTok in particular — from 3% in 2020 to 20% in 2025 — represents the most rapid expansion among tracked platforms and signals a fundamental transformation in how news is packaged and consumed.

The news content distributed across these platforms differs substantially in form and quality. Short-form video content, often created by individual creators rather than established news organizations, dominates algorithmically amplified feeds. The implications for accuracy, context, and civic utility are significant — and under-researched.

**TABLE 2: Platform Usage for News Among U.S. Adults (2025)**

Platform	% Regular Use	2020 Baseline	Change	Key Observation
Facebook	38%	36%	+2 pts	Stable across all demographics
YouTube	38%	26%	+12 pts	Strong video-centric appeal
TikTok	20% (43% under-30)	3%	+17 pts	Sharpest growth trajectory
Instagram	~22%	11%	+11 pts	Youth and visual content oriented
X (Twitter)	~17%	15%	+2 pts	Declining since 2022 rebrand
Podcasts	~14%	8%	+6 pts	Growth among 25–49 cohort

Source: Pew Research Center Social Media and News Fact Sheet, 2025.

TikTok's ascent — from 3% in 2020 to 20% in 2025 — represents the most rapid expansion among all tracked platforms. Among adults under 30, nearly half (43%) regularly obtain news from TikTok, fundamentally reshaping how younger generations encounter civic information.

**SECTION 4**

**FORMAT PREFERENCES: THE VISUAL DOMINANCE OF NEWS**

Visual consumption has emerged as the dominant format for news, with 44% of adults expressing a preference for watching news rather than reading or listening. This preference is age-dependent and reflects both the technological affordances of contemporary media and deeply ingrained consumption habits formed across a lifetime of media exposure.

Among those who prefer to watch news, traditional television remains the favored medium (62%), though streaming services and on-demand video continue to gain traction. The persistence of television — particularly among adults aged 50 and older — reflects the medium's historical centrality to news consumption rather than a contemporary reaffirmation of its advantages over digital alternatives.

The preference for visual formats has significant editorial implications. News organizations that cannot or do not invest in high-quality video production face structural disadvantages in audience retention. Meanwhile, the

compression of news into short-form visual formats — TikTok videos, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts — risks reducing complex civic issues to emotionally resonant but informationally thin vignettes.

**TABLE 3: Preferred News Format by Age Group (2025)**

Age Group	Prefer Watching (%)	Prefer Reading (%)	Prefer Listening (%)	Primary Screen
18–29	38%	37%	25%	Smartphone / Social Media
30–49	41%	38%	21%	Smartphone / Computer
50–64	49%	36%	15%	TV / Computer
65+	57%	31%	12%	Television
All Adults	44%	35%	18%	Mixed

Source: Pew Research Center, November 2025.

SECTION 5

## GENERATIONAL VARIATIONS IN CONSUMPTION HABITS

Age emerges as the primary differentiator in news consumption behavior, with patterns across generational cohorts diverging on platform selection, engagement intensity, trusted sources, and content format preferences. These disparities are not merely incremental — they represent fundamentally different relationships with civic information that will shape the media landscape for decades.

Young adults aged 18–29 exhibit the lowest rates of intentional news engagement, with only 15% following news closely — compared to 62% of those aged 65 and older. Yet this cohort is not uninformed; rather, they are differently informed. Forty-three percent regularly use TikTok for news, substantial proportions rely on Instagram and YouTube, and 39% obtain news from influencers — social media personalities who may or may not have journalistic training or accountability structures.

Incidental political news exposure is notably high among young adults (70%), suggesting that while intentional consumption is low, ambient exposure through algorithmic feeds provides ongoing — if uneven — connection to current events. Trust in social media information among younger cohorts approaches, and in some cases matches, their trust in national news organizations — a development with profound implications for information verification norms.

Older cohorts maintain higher overall engagement and prioritize television and local news sources. Adults 65 and older are the most consistent consumers of traditional news media, with television retaining its status as the dominant platform. Local news — despite decades of financial contraction — continues to hold relatively higher trust ratings among this group, suggesting that proximity and community connection remain powerful drivers of engagement.

**TABLE 4: News Consumption Profile by Generational Cohort (2025)**

Cohort (Age)	Follow Closely (%)	Top Platform	Trust Nat'l News (%)	Rely on Influencers (%)
Gen Z (18–29)	15%	TikTok / Instagram	~38%	39%
Millennials (30–44)	27%	YouTube / Instagram	~47%	21%
Gen X (45–59)	41%	Facebook / TV	~52%	9%
Boomers (60–74)	57%	Television	~61%	3%
Silent Gen (75+)	62%	TV / Print	~64%	<2%

Source: Pew Research Center, 2025. Trust and influencer figures are approximate based on survey subgroup analysis.

These disparities portend a future media environment increasingly oriented toward short-form, personalized, and influencer-mediated content. The challenge for democratic governance is ensuring that this transformation does not produce irreconcilable informational silos — cohorts operating with wholly separate and potentially incompatible factual foundations.

SECTION 6

## TRUST IN MEDIA SOURCES: EROSION AND POLARIZATION

Confidence in media institutions has reached historically low levels across multiple independent tracking surveys. Gallup reports that 28% of Americans express a great deal or fair amount of trust in mass media — a figure that has declined steadily since peaking in the mid-1970s and has reached new lows in 2025. Pew Research Center data simultaneously finds 56% expressing some trust in national news organizations, representing an 11-point decline since March 2025 alone — a rate of erosion without precedent in the survey's history.

Partisan asymmetries in media trust are acute and represent perhaps the most consequential dimension of the trust crisis. Republicans register single-digit trust levels in national news organizations (approximately 8%), while Democratic respondents maintain substantially higher confidence (approximately 51%). This partisan gap — spanning more than 40 percentage points — effectively means that a significant portion of the electorate approaches mainstream news coverage with profound skepticism, if not outright rejection.

Generational dimensions of trust further complicate the picture. Trust declines are particularly pronounced among youth and middle-aged groups, suggesting that the erosion is not solely a product of partisan realignment but reflects broader cultural skepticism toward institutional authority. Local news organizations retain somewhat higher trust than national counterparts, and nonprofit news outlets demonstrate trust levels that outperform both.

**TABLE 5: Media Trust by Partisan Affiliation (2025)**

Group	Trust: National News (%)	Trust: Local News (%)	Trust: Social Media (%)	Change Since 2020
Democrats	51%	62%	28%	-7 pts
Independents	26%	41%	19%	-12 pts
Republicans	8%	22%	14%	-18 pts
All Adults	28%	43%	20%	-11 pts

Source: Gallup, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2025.

The trust crisis has recursive qualities: lower trust may drive consumers toward alternative sources that reinforce distrust of mainstream outlets, while declining audiences weaken the financial position of news organizations, potentially reducing editorial quality and further eroding public confidence. Breaking this cycle requires coordinated interventions across the journalistic, educational, and policy domains.

### SECTION 7

## EMERGING PATTERNS AND BROADER IMPLICATIONS

Beyond the primary dimensions analyzed above, several emergent patterns merit attention for their potential to reshape the media landscape in the coming years.

**Influencer and Podcast Growth.** Influencers and podcasts attract growing audiences, particularly among younger cohorts. The appeal of these formats reflects preferences for personality-driven, conversational, and longer-form audio content that stands in contrast to both traditional broadcast formats and algorithmically

compressed social video. Podcasts in particular have demonstrated resilience and audience loyalty that many traditional formats struggle to match.

**News Avoidance.** A growing share of Americans actively avoid news, citing overload, emotional distress, and a sense of powerlessness. This avoidance behavior is not randomly distributed — it correlates with lower education levels, younger age, and partisan identification among those who feel alienated from political institutions.

**Algorithmic Curation and Echo Chambers.** Algorithmic curation fosters personalization at scale but carries systematic risks of reinforcing prior beliefs, reducing exposure to counter-attitudinal content, and amplifying emotionally provocative material over substantively important reporting. The mechanisms by which platform algorithms select, rank, and present news content are largely opaque to both users and regulators, creating significant accountability gaps.

**Artificial Intelligence in News.** The integration of artificial intelligence in news production and distribution introduces additional complexity. AI-generated summaries, automated reporting, and algorithmically personalized news digests are becoming more common. While these tools offer efficiency gains, they also introduce new vectors for error, bias, and the potential erosion of the journalistic judgment that distinguishes verified reporting from raw information aggregation.

**TABLE 6: Key Emerging Trends and Policy Implications**

Emerging Trend	Current Magnitude	Primary Risk	Policy Opportunity
Influencer-based news	39% of under-30 rely on influencers	Unverified claims; no editorial accountability	Disclosure standards; media literacy
Podcast news growth	+6 pts since 2020 (14% regular users)	Selective exposure; echo chambers	Support for public podcast journalism
News avoidance	~40% avoid news sometimes or often	Civic disengagement; democratic deficit	Reengagement journalism; local focus
AI-generated content	Rapid expansion in 2024–2025	Quality dilution; disinformation risks	Transparency labels; regulatory frameworks
Algorithmic curation	Dominant delivery mechanism	Echo chambers; emotional amplification	Platform transparency requirements

Source: CDRI analysis drawing on Pew Research Center and industry data, 2025.

**CONCLUSION**

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## **CONCLUSION**

The patterns of news consumption observed in 2025 reveal a media ecosystem in profound transition, marked by the ascendance of digital and social platforms, a pronounced preference for visual formats, deepening generational cleavages, and historically low levels of institutional trust. While technological advancements have democratized access to information and enabled unprecedented personalization, they have simultaneously contributed to fragmentation, incidental exposure, and the erosion of shared informational commons.

These developments carry significant ramifications for democratic functioning. Reduced intentional news-following, coupled with reliance on algorithmically curated and influencer-driven content among younger cohorts, heightens vulnerabilities to misinformation, selective exposure, and polarized worldviews. The widening partisan and generational trust gaps further complicate efforts to sustain public discourse grounded in verifiable facts.

Nevertheless, the data also point toward constructive pathways. The enduring appeal of local news sources in certain contexts, the potential of engaging video formats, and opportunities for journalistic innovation suggest avenues for rebuilding engagement and credibility. Policymakers, media organizations, and educators must prioritize media literacy initiatives, algorithmic transparency, support for quality journalism, and strategies tailored to re-engage disaffected demographics.

Ultimately, preserving an informed citizenry in this evolving landscape demands vigilant, evidence-based responses that balance innovation with safeguards for informational integrity and civic cohesion. The Civic Data & Research Institute will continue to monitor these developments and provide data-driven analysis to support informed public discourse.

**POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

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## **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the analysis presented in this report, the Civic Data & Research Institute identifies the following areas warranting attention from policymakers, institutional leaders, and civic organizations:

1. **Media Literacy Education.** Systematic investment in media literacy curricula at the K–12 and post-secondary levels is essential to equip citizens — particularly young adults — with the critical evaluation skills necessary to navigate fragmented information environments. Such programs should address source verification, algorithmic awareness, and the distinction between reporting and opinion.

2. **Local Journalism Support.** Local news organizations — which maintain relatively higher public trust than national counterparts — require structural support to survive the economic pressures of

digital transition. Public and philanthropic funding mechanisms, tax incentives for local news subscriptions, and cooperative ownership models represent viable pathways.

3. **Platform Algorithmic Transparency.** Regulatory frameworks requiring meaningful transparency in news ranking and distribution algorithms would enable researchers, regulators, and citizens to better understand and contest the curation mechanisms shaping information flows. Transparency alone does not resolve the underlying incentive structures, but it is a necessary precondition.

4. **Influencer Accountability Standards.** As influencers become primary news sources for a substantial portion of younger Americans, extending disclosure requirements and accountability norms to cover civic information — not merely commercial advertising — merits serious consideration.

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## ABOUT THE CIVIC DATA & RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Civic Data & Research Institute (CDRI) is a nonpartisan research organization dedicated to data-driven analysis and public education on civic and public policy issues affecting the general public. CDRI produces research reports, polling analyses, and data resources designed to support informed public discourse and evidence-based policymaking.

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