



# The Medill survey 2025: How the Chicago area gets its news

Second annual examination of the public's interest in and reliance on local news — how and why it is consumed, what people think, and the impact of artificial intelligence

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**Northwestern**  
MEDILL  
Local News Initiative

# Examining how local news consumption habits are changing

During times of revolutionary change, it can seem that one year heralds a decades' worth of transformation. This has been one of those times.

A little more than a year ago, the Medill Local News Initiative at Northwestern University commissioned a survey of how Chicago-area residents consume news. It was believed to be one of the most comprehensive studies of news consumption behaviors and attitudes in the Chicago region.

For this survey, we wanted to explore just how much the news habits of people are continuing to evolve. The answer? Significantly.

Content creators outpace venerable newspapers and radio stations as sources of local news. Smart phones have blown past TV as the device of choice to consume news. People are growing comfortable with the use of artificial intelligence in news – if humans are involved. And a yawning, generational gulf has widened in how the young and old get their news.

Through it all, however, there's at least one constant: The vast majority of people still consume local news.

As she did last year, Medill's Associate Dean of Research Stephanie Edgerly, a leading national expert in news audiences, spearheaded this year's survey. She worked with our partners at NORC, one of America's most respected polling organizations based at the University of Chicago. The survey includes 1,101 people in the 14-county Chicago metropolitan area who were polled in May and June.

Medill is grateful for the generous support of the Robert R. McCormick Foundation that allowed us to conduct this survey. And for the second consecutive year, we thank our partners at M. Harris & Co., a Chicago-based marketing and communications agency, for their invaluable contributions to the execution, writing and design of this report.

We hope news professionals, philanthropists, policymakers and scholars who are grappling with a media ecosystem in upheaval will find these results illuminating.

**Tim Franklin**  
Senior Associate Dean  
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John M. Mutz Chair in Local News

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SEPTEMBER 2025



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# Executive summary



## Medill survey of Chicago-area news consumers: Digital transformation in full force

The relationship between the news business and consumers of news is breaking down and reforming at a dizzying pace as digital technology gives audiences new ways to engage with information.

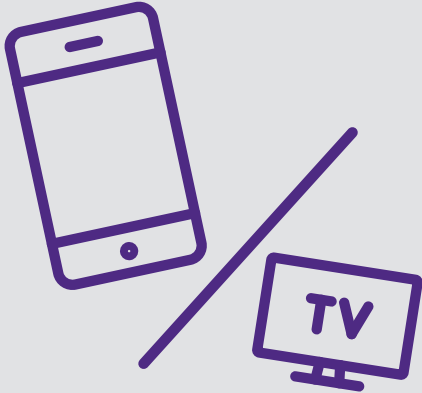
Certainly, every journalism era is transformational. Newspaper domination gave way to radio and broadcast television, followed by cable TV with its 24-hour news cycle. Each sea change created financial winners and losers for both the national and local news ecosystems.

The digital era is even more disruptive to legacy journalism because smartphones and social media put information choices – and information creation – in the hands of each consumer. The great gatekeepers of journalism must compete for attention and revenue with myriad other options, from websites and podcasts to TikTok users and individual Substack writers. The results have been catastrophic for the news business, especially print publications, as audiences scatter. TV news is now under the same pressure. All must adapt or fall further behind.

The Medill Local News Initiative at Northwestern University produces groundbreaking research about the digital revolution's impact on local journalism, with the goal of supporting industry professionals as they reshape news organizations into sustainable, vigorous enterprises. For the second year in a row, the Local News Initiative commissioned a comprehensive, scientific survey of news consumer habits and opinions in the Chicago metropolitan area. This survey of 1,101 adults examined news consumer behavior in Chicagoland, but it can be taken as a microcosm for what is happening locally across the country. The survey included the city, suburbs, exurbs and rural areas on the outskirts of the metro area.

The 2025 results capture the digital transformation in full force, as local news consumers – especially young adults – embrace new options for getting information.

## A few highlights:



### Smartphones dominate TV

Two-thirds of those surveyed (**67%**) frequently use a smartphone to consume local news, ahead of television (**53%**), confirming the shift in preference identified in the 2024 Medill survey.

### Content creators are more popular than local newspapers

Nearly one-third (**30%**) of respondents consume local news daily from content creators (such as people posting on social media and self-published writers on sites like Substack), compared to 18% who rely on local newspapers.



### Audiences still follow local news ...

The majority of Chicago-area residents (**52%**) consume news daily, a solid number....

### ... As Gen Z takes a pass

Just **32%** of people ages 18-29 follow local news daily.

### Consumers are skeptical of AI



of consumers are uncomfortable with local news produced mostly by artificial intelligence. However **47%** approve of a supporting role for AI in news production.

The survey was undertaken by Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications, with funding by the McCormick Foundation. The authors are Medill Professor Stephanie Edgerly, Associate Dean of Research; and Tim Franklin, Senior Associate Dean, John M. Mutz Chair in Local News and Director of the Medill Local News Initiative. NORC at the University of Chicago, on Medill's behalf, surveyed adults throughout the 14-county Chicago metro area, including counties in Indiana and Wisconsin. The margin of error was +/- 4.72%. (See our detailed explanation of the methodology.)

### Younger vs. older is a key marker

The Medill survey results offer a clearly positive note for local news professionals and others tracking the industry: Chicago-area consumers maintain a strong relationship with the news. The majority of Chicago-area adults (52%) follow local news daily, while 85% engage with local news providers at least once a week.

For comparison's sake, the survey probed interest in national news and found consumers are even more engaged weekly with national news (89%). The survey, conducted in the spring of 2025, captured a





snapshot in time of consumer habits and opinions. That period coincided with the busy early months of President Donald Trump's second term, when the president and his administration were making national headlines daily. This may explain the spike in interest with national news.

Warning signs about changes in news consumption habits came into focus at the level of demographic differences, especially when survey results were broken down by age bracket. There is a clear generational shift underway, with younger consumers turning away from television and showing much less interest in news overall.

### Specifically:

- Almost two-thirds (61%) of adults ages 60+ consume local news vs. just 32% of people

ages 18-29 (members of Generation Z). While consumers tend to become more interested in news as they age, this generation is different in many ways. If trends continue, nearly half of news audiences may be at risk of fading away over time, as big a warning sign as any that news professionals must find new ways to engage the public.

- The drop-off of interest among the 18-29 group intensified from the 2024 Medill survey, when the engagement rate was 39%.

### AI and content creation: the future?

In one of this year's most important discoveries, the survey examined consumer perceptions about the use of artificial intelligence to produce news, and found several schisms. Besides identifying a differ-

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



ence in acceptance rate between news produced mainly by AI and news produced mainly by human journalists, the survey found respondents ages 60+ are more uncomfortable (58%) with AI-produced local news than those ages 18-29 (48%).

But undercutting the view that younger consumers are the most open to new technology, only 38% of respondents in the youngest age bracket were comfortable with local news produced mostly by humans with AI assistance, compared to 57% of people ages 45-59. That result could be related to the experience of using AI, with younger, tech-savvy audiences recognizing the limitations of large-language model chatbots.

The survey also identified content creation as a significant source of local news for those who consume it daily. When the survey asked how respondents consume local news, content creation was chosen by 30% of respondents, in the top 4 after local TV stations, search engines and online groups or communities. The category (which includes social media creators, Substack writers and others) came in well ahead of local newspapers (18%), showing that individuals can compete with major news organizations to develop followings and build trust.

### Among other important findings of the Medill survey:

- Just 15% of respondents said they currently pay for local news, slightly more than the share who pay for national news (12%). These dire figures are generally in line with other survey results, including last year's Medill study. One bright spot: the survey found that higher-educated consumers are more likely to pay.

- Among the great majority who don't pay for news, nearly half (45%) said there were no obvious inducements, such as discounts or perks, that would persuade them to subscribe.
- Many consumers (62%) are not aware of the financial struggles of local news.
- Consumers find national news more stressful than local news to read and watch, and are more likely to avoid watching or reading national news than local news. This result could represent an opportunity for local news organizations to find ways to keep audiences engaged by distinguishing their coverage.

### The major takeaway – urgency

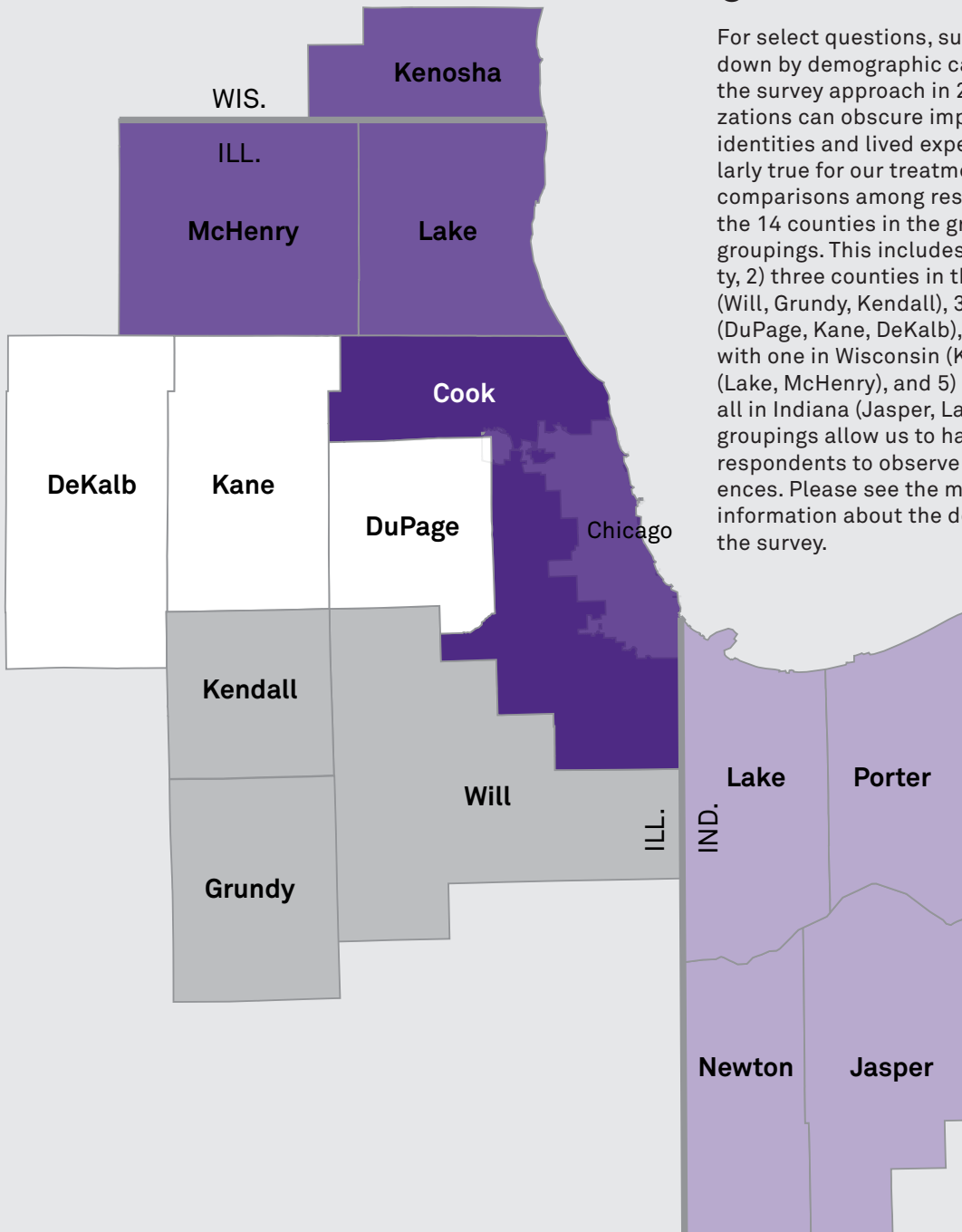
The 2025 Medill survey results convey the urgency required by local news organizations to keep up with fast-changing technology and news consumption habits. Audiences are fleeing traditional media, finding new ways to get information. Younger adults generally consume much less local news.

Within those ominous parameters, the survey identifies important opportunities for news organizations to engage with the public. With 85% of Chicago-area consumers still connected with news on a weekly basis, that's a tremendous potential audience, one that has its device of choice, the smartphone, nearly always at hand. It's up to news organizations to determine how to attract and maintain relationships with that audience.



## Breaking down the greater Chicago area

For select questions, survey findings are broken down by demographic categories consistent with the survey approach in 2024. Demographic categorizations can obscure important nuances in people's identities and lived experiences, and this is particularly true for our treatment of geography. To facilitate comparisons among respondents, we transformed the 14 counties in the greater Chicago MSA into five groupings. This includes groupings for: 1) Cook County, 2) three counties in the southwest Chicago area (Will, Grundy, Kendall), 3) three counties to the west (DuPage, Kane, DeKalb), 4) three northern counties, with one in Wisconsin (Kenosha) and two in Illinois (Lake, McHenry), and 5) four southern counties, all in Indiana (Jasper, Lake, Newton, Porter). These groupings allow us to have a sufficient number of respondents to observe some county-level differences. Please see the methodology section for more information about the demographic composition of the survey.



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# Local news consumption

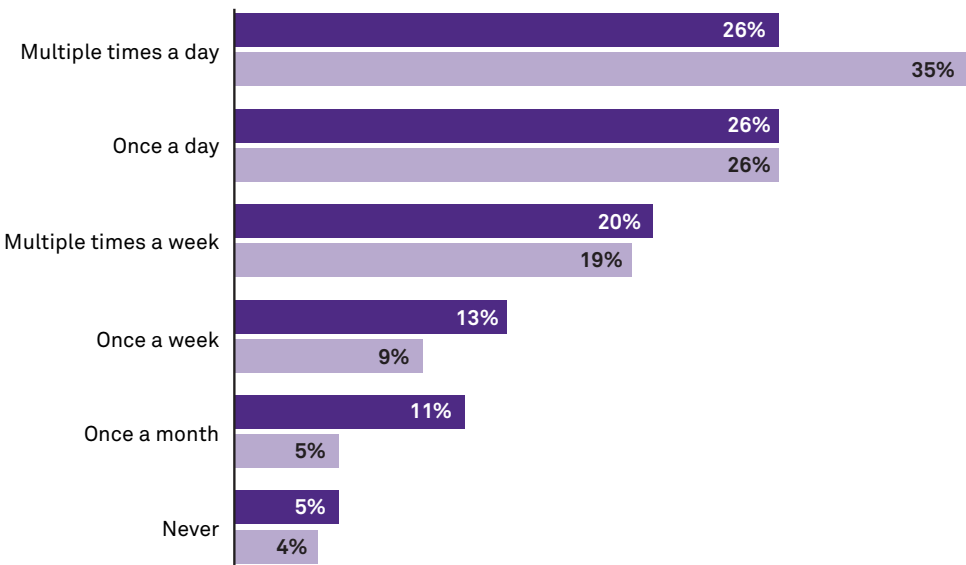
## What we found:

- Consumers still broadly value local news.
- Few members of Gen Z (ages 18-29) follow local news.
- The smartphone, not television, is the device of choice.
- Content creators are more popular news sources than local newspapers.

# How much news people consume

## HOW OFTEN RESPONDENTS CONSUME LOCAL VS. NATIONAL NEWS

Local news about your local community   National news



NOTE: Because of rounding and the omission of missing responses, totals may not add to 100 percent.

## Consumers value local news and information

About one-half (52%) of all adults in the Chicago metropolitan area consume local news every day, whether once or multiple times, according to this survey from Northwestern University’s Medill Local News Initiative. That consumer commitment to local news represents a strong endorsement for an industry struggling to maintain financial footing at a time of technological and generational change.

The full report that follows identifies many specific changes in habits that are reshaping the local news industry, but the starting point is determining how much consumers value news as a product. The answer in the Chicago area is a positive one.

According to the survey, about one-quarter (26%) of adults consume local news multiple times a day, while an additional quarter (26%) consume news once a day, for a total of 52%. Another 33% of people consume local news at least once a week

or multiple times a week, which means 85% of consumers in the Chicago area maintain a weekly relationship with a provider of local news and information. Just 5% of respondents said they never consume local news.

Other surveys have reported that consumer interest in national news rates about the same as local news, but this year’s Medill study found consumers to be more engaged in national than local news. The survey found that 61% of residents



consume national news once or multiple times per day. This represents a total weekly engagement rate of 90%, above the 85% rate for local news. Just 4% of respondents said they never consume national news.

The survey did not seek to answer why respondents appeared so engaged with national news, but it's important to keep in mind that this survey is a snapshot in time of consumer habits and opinions about their interest in news. The period of surveying for this report — from May 22 to June 16, 2025 — occurred during the busy early months of President Donald Trump's second term, when he and his administration were making national headlines daily.

In general, Chicago-area residents appear to be more engaged with local news and national news than the nation at large. The survey found that 52% of respondents consume local news once or multiple times a day, and 61% said they consume national news once or multiple times a day. A 2024 Pew Research Center study found that just 22% of Americans follow local news closely. These results bolster the notion that people in the Chicago metropolitan area want to be served by journalism professionals. For the industry, the challenge is figuring out how to engage through different and new media, especially with the generational turnover.

### Engaging a younger audience

*The gap in local news consumption between older and younger respondents represents an important opening for newsrooms to engage a new generation, said Medill Professor Stephanie Edgerly, Associate Dean of Research:*

“Young people aren’t consuming local news at the same rate that older generations do. But this reality does not have to spell doom. It can be an opportunity for newsrooms to rethink and experiment with how local stories are told and delivered so that local news becomes indispensable to a new generation.”



# An alarming generational freefall

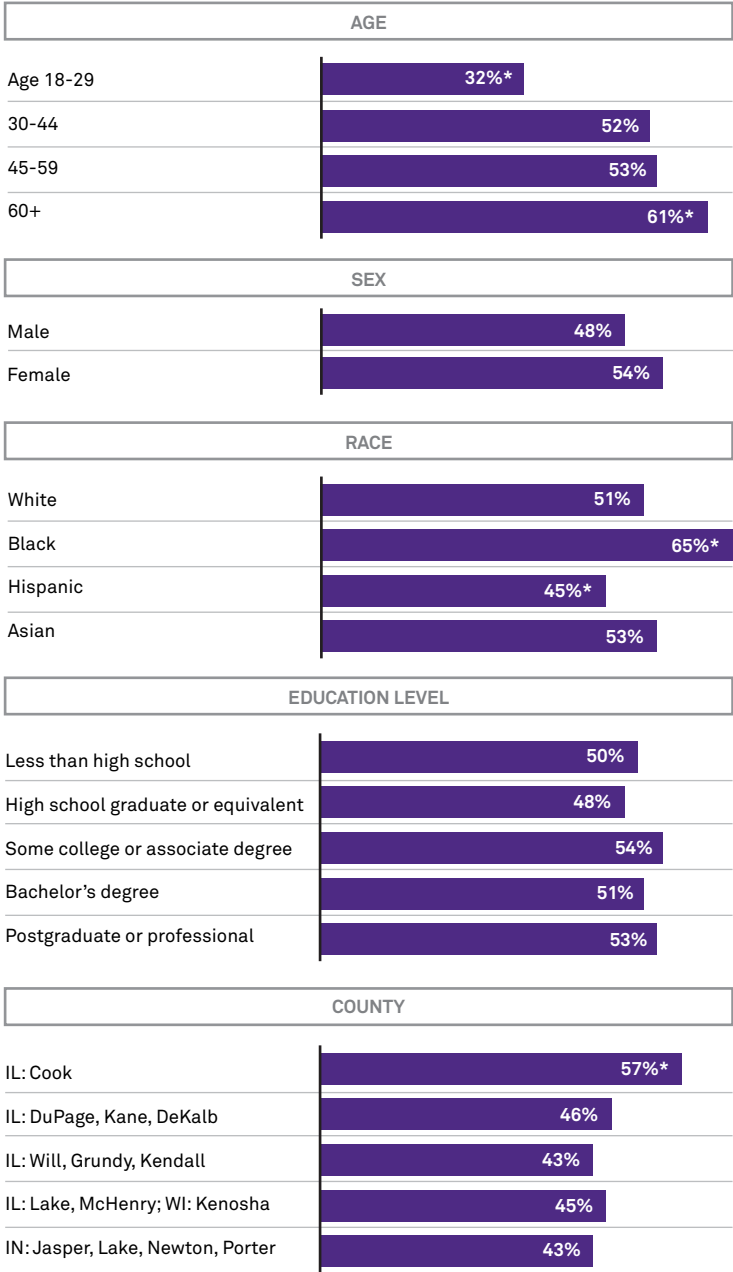
Looking inside the results, there is a significant fall-off of consumption of local news for the youngest cohort of adults. This group has significantly less interest in local news than compared to the oldest generation of news consumers. While consumers tend to become more interested in news as they age, this generation is different in many ways. If trends continue, nearly half of news audiences may be at risk of fading away over time, as big a warning sign as any that news professionals must find new ways to attract audiences.

Almost two-thirds (61%) of adults ages 60+ consume local news daily or multiple times daily, compared to 32% of people ages 18-29 (members of Generation Z). The shares rise from there, with 52% of people 30-44 and 53% of people 45-59 reporting that they consume news daily or multiple times a day.

The drop-off of consumption among the 18-29 group intensified from the 2024 Medill survey, when the engagement rate was 39%.

## CONSUMPTION OF LOCAL NEWS ONCE OR MULTIPLE TIMES A DAY

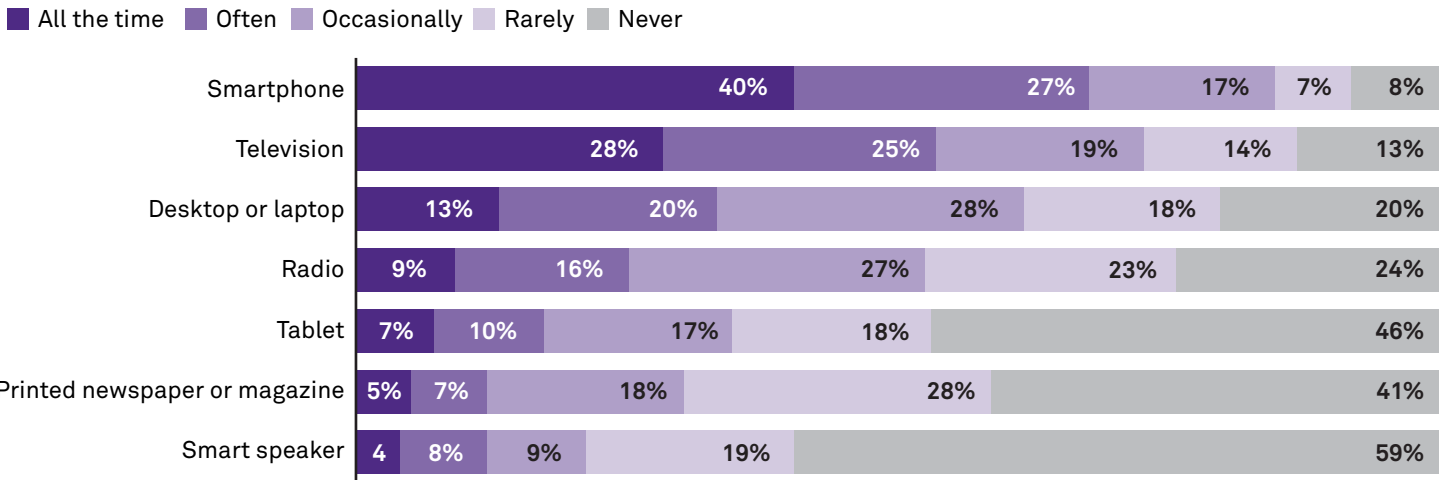
% of respondents in each demographic group



Note: \* = Denotes a statistically significant difference between respondents who belong to the given group and those who do not, at least at the 0.05 level.

# How local news is consumed

## HOW OFTEN RESPONDENTS USE EACH DEVICE TO CONSUME LOCAL NEWS



NOTE: Because of rounding and the omission of missing responses, totals may not add to 100 percent.

## Smartphone is the device of choice

For decades, the broadest news audiences were reached via television because nearly every household owned a set. This positioned TV news outlets for financial success. A new era is now underway, in which the smartphone is the medium of choice for accessing news, not television. This is an audience shift of epic proportions.

Last year’s Medill survey was one of the first studies of local news to confirm the changing of the guard. According to the results of the 2024 survey,

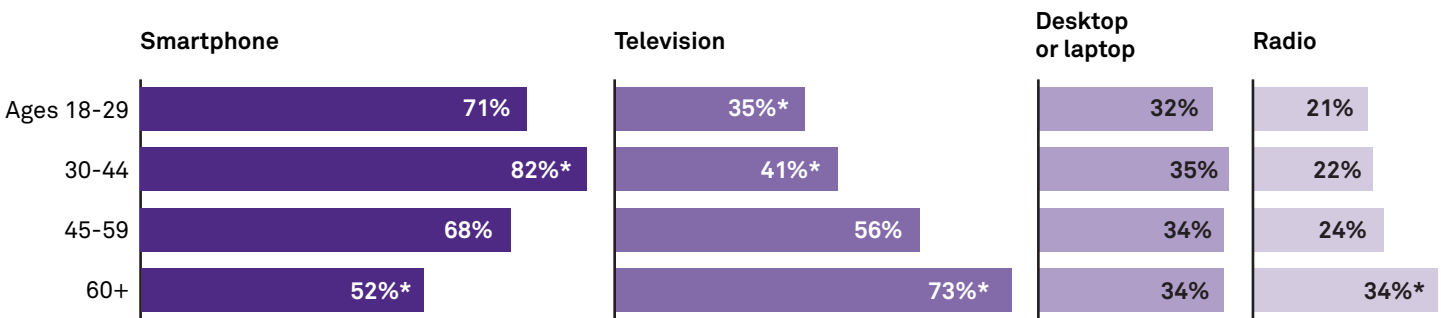
more people (62%) said they used their phones to get local news all the time or often than watched television all the time or often (52%). The gap has widened with this year’s survey: 67% of people said they use their phones to get local news all the time or often, compared to 53% who rely on television.

Two other news traditions are under siege: radio (25%) and newspapers or magazines (12%) are far less popular mediums.

LOCAL NEWS CONSUMPTION

DEVICES PREFERRED BY PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT AGES

Percentage within each age group who said they use device all the time or often to consume local news



Note: \* = Denotes a statistically significant difference between respondents who belong to the given group and those who do not, at least at the 0.05 level.

Younger (smartphone) vs. older (television)

The survey confirms several habit differences based on age. Not surprisingly, smartphones are twice as popular as television among 18-to-29-year-olds (71% vs. 35%). Older consumers are the most likely to maintain their lifelong habit of watching television news (73% television vs. 52% smartphone). The consumer shift away from cable TV subscribing certainly plays a role.

The results show one unexpected result: the 30-44 age bracket is more reliant on the smartphone (82%) than 18-to-29-year-olds. The survey didn’t explicitly explore this phenomenon, but it may be that the lifestyle and financial needs of the 30-44 cohort play a role. Many of these consumers, having launched careers, are gaining in income and settling into communities, and thus feel a greater need to stay connected to news and information.



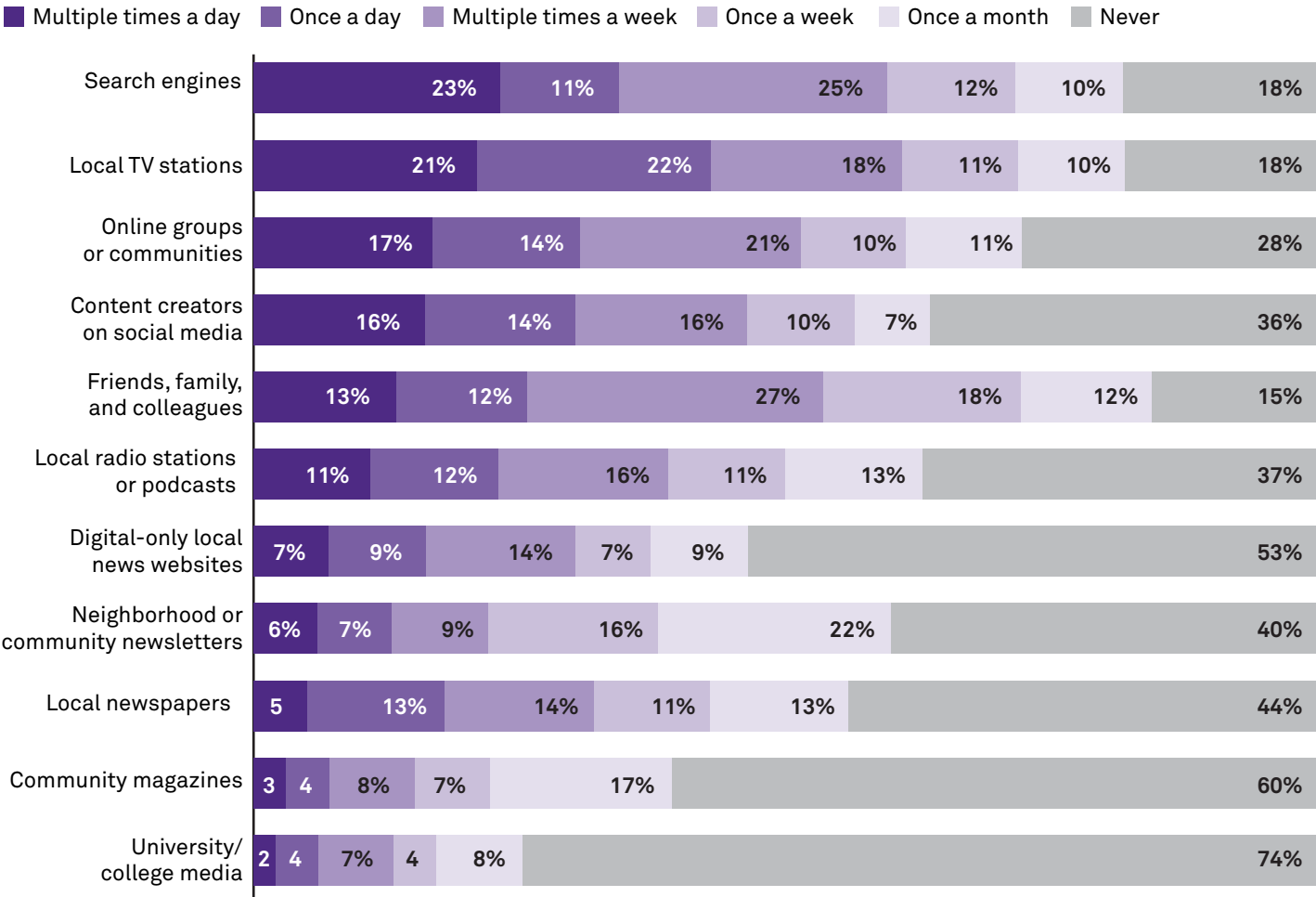
Bad news for TV

The survey confirmed it’s not just print newspapers in crisis. Television is next. Tim Franklin, Medill Senior Associate Dean, Professor and John M. Mutz Chair in Local News, observed:

“With the results of this survey, we can definitively say that smart-phones are now the preferred choice to consume local news. Frankly, I was surprised by how much the gap widened in a year, but we know we’re seeing more cord-cutting from linear television and more stream-ing of video content on phones. Just as the newspaper industry is in dire condition because readers abandoned print, the survey shows that local TV news is next in line. I’ve heard industry executives acknowl-edge this: Their business is in crisis, too.”

# Sources of local news

## HOW OFTEN RESPONDENTS CONSUME LOCAL NEWS FROM DIFFERENT SOURCES



NOTE: Because of rounding and the omission of missing responses, totals may not add to 100 percent.

## A closer look at how audiences seek out news

The devices people use for local news is one layer of consumer decision-making. Then there is the important question of usage preferences. In other words, which specific sources of local news across any medium (search engines vs. TV news outlets etc.) do audiences seek out and rely upon? This question gets more directly at consumer choices and habits.

About four in 10 respondents said they get local news at least once a day from local television

stations (43%) and search engines (34%). This was followed by online groups or communities (31%) and content creators on social media (30%). Local newspapers trailed, with 18% of respondents saying they rely on local newspapers across different media.

In the digital age it's important to recognize how barriers have broken down between competitors.

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News providers of all types can disseminate information in various ways. Consumers who say they watch local TV news are getting information from specific news organizations, but the source could be their living room sets, or through a TV station's app or social media feed. The options for consumers are vast. Community social media sites and individual journalists are building digital audiences, while newspapers also have YouTube channels, social media feeds, email blasts and other avenues. Respondents were asked to take into account not just which sources they sought out but how they got their news. More about that below.

### **Eye on content creators**

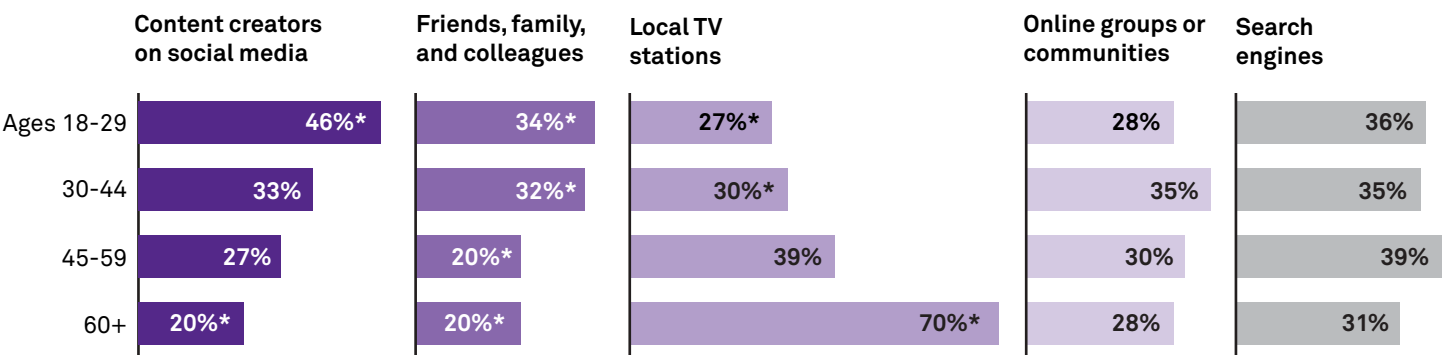
*More respondents said they consumed local news from content creators than from more traditional news sources. Tim Franklin, Medill Senior Associate Dean, Professor and John M. Mutz Chair in Local News, said:*

“This confirms that audiences are increasingly turning to content creators for news. What’s surprising is how quickly they’re surpassing venerable news brands and platforms as an information source. One of the big questions is what legacy news outlets can learn from the success of content creators to attract audience. Make no mistake: This trend represents yet another major inflection point for traditional local news outlets.”

# Looking inside the results

## NEWS SOURCES PREFERRED BY PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT AGES

Percentage within each age group who said they consume local news from source once or multiple times a day



Note: \* = Denotes a statistically significant difference between respondents who belong to the given group and those who do not, at least at the 0.05 level.

## Rise of the content creators (decline of newspapers)

Content creators get a significant amount of attention as influencers and entertainers, but the survey results show their impact on the news ecosystem. The survey did not ask respondents to identify specific influencers, but they can be understood to include everyone from local writers with Substack readership to TikTok creators. In total, the survey shows, content creators surpass digital-only local news websites, local radio stations or podcasts and local newspapers as sources of information.

### A decline in search engine usage?

This year’s survey results showed a noticeable decline from last year in respondents’ use of search engines to access news and information. The rate dropped from 41% to 34%. While these two survey results represent a limited data set, it’s possible this year’s results catch a new trend playing out: the rise of artificial intelligence chatbots. Where consumers previously would have relied heavily on search engines to seek out information, perhaps they are gravitating to large language model (LLM) chatbots for answers to their questions. The implications for news professionals are large. As people become less tied to search engines, fewer consumers may peruse headlines or click through to news sites.

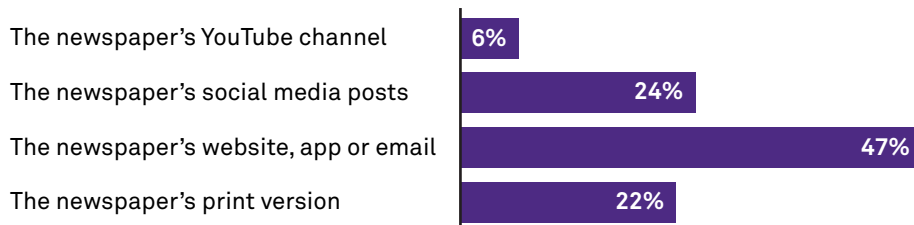


## LOCAL NEWS CONSUMPTION

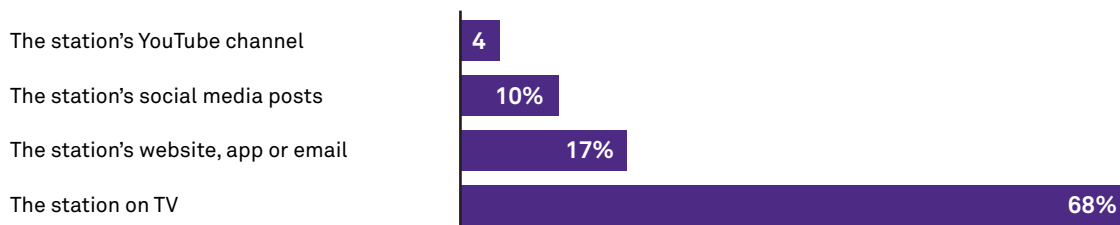
### HOW PEOPLE PRIMARILY GET LOCAL NEWS FROM DIFFERENT SOURCES

Among respondents who said they consume news from that source at least once a month.

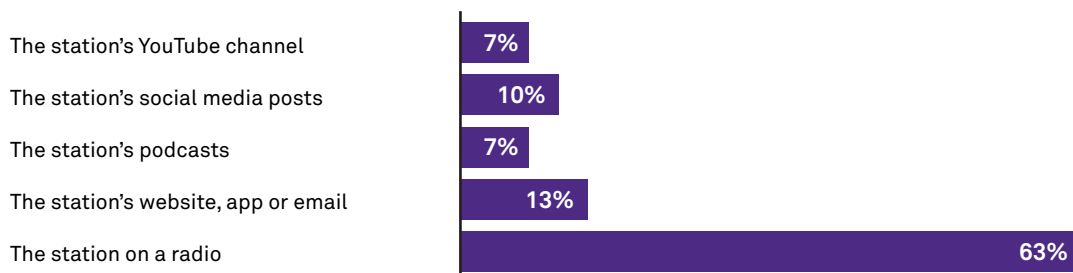
#### Local newspapers



#### Local tv stations



#### Local radio stations or podcasts



NOTE: Because of rounding and the omission of missing responses, totals may not add to 100 percent.

## TV not yet a powerhouse on the internet

As mentioned, news organizations can disseminate information across different media. The survey asked two questions to track consumer loyalty or interest. Of respondents who said they consume local newspapers at least once a month, nearly half (47%) said they get information from the newspaper's website, app or email, compared to 22% reading the print version of the newspaper. No surprise there, given the industry's loss of print subscribers. Of respondents who reported consuming news from local TV stations at least once a month, 68% said they were watching the station on TV. Just 17% said they were getting local TV news via website, app or email, indicating that local TV outlets are still looking for new ways to connect to audiences.

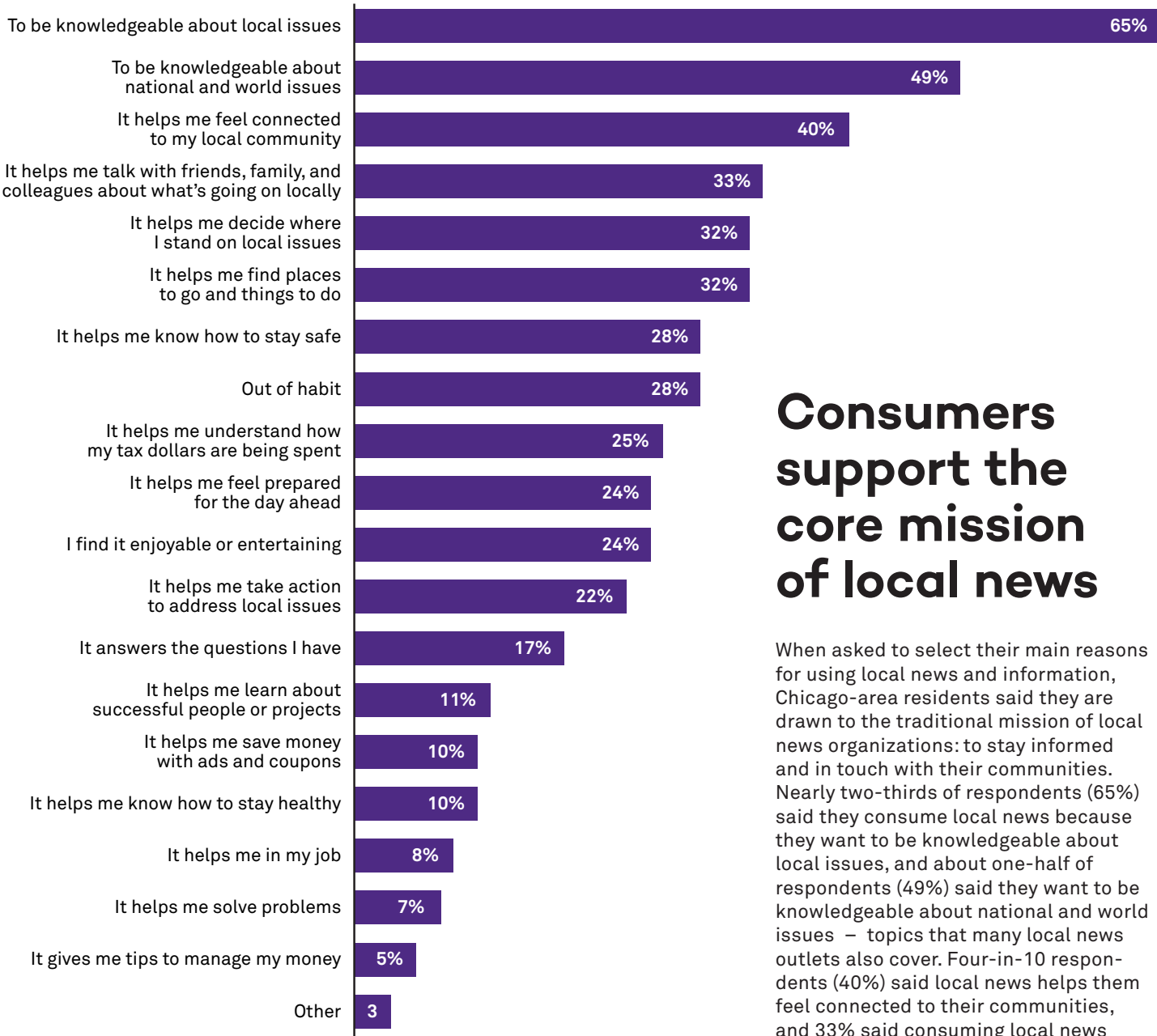
#### Can local TV make the jump to digital?

The survey found that local TV news audiences haven't migrated in large audiences to TV station apps or YouTube channels. Medill Professor Stephanie Edgerly, Associate Dean of Research, observed:

"Television has an aging audience that is very attached to the native device for consuming local news. Whereas newspapers have been forced to develop other media forms and products that exist beyond print, that shift has not fully happened yet for television or radio. Or at least audience aren't using them. That's a challenge."

LOCAL NEWS CONSUMPTION

REASONS RESPONDENTS CONSUME LOCAL NEWS



NOTE: Percentages indicate a “yes” response; multiple responses permitted.

Consumers support the core mission of local news

When asked to select their main reasons for using local news and information, Chicago-area residents said they are drawn to the traditional mission of local news organizations: to stay informed and in touch with their communities. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65%) said they consume local news because they want to be knowledgeable about local issues, and about one-half of respondents (49%) said they want to be knowledgeable about national and world issues – topics that many local news outlets also cover. Four-in-10 respondents (40%) said local news helps them feel connected to their communities, and 33% said consuming local news helps them talk with other people about what’s going on locally.

Respondents could choose as many answers as they wished, with most selecting three or four. Further down the list were topics of self-improvement, including “helps me to stay healthy” (10%) and

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“helps me save money” (10%). In last year’s survey results for the same question about motivations to consume local news, respondents gave remarkably different answers. That survey showed consumers were most interested in receiving help navigating everyday life, with “save or manage money” (60%) and “stay healthy” (52%) topping the list.

The shift in results is surprising but understandable, given that the Medill survey is a snapshot in time, and news events and issues constantly change. During the time last year’s survey was conducted, inflation was a hot topic and the country was still coming out of COVID. This year, events in Washington are dominating headlines, including the local impact of a new presidential administration. What the survey results appear to indicate is that audience interests shift, just as the news flow is always dynamic. News organizations that respond quickly to trends of the day with useful news and information are more likely to find success.

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# Funding local news

## What we found

- Few people pay for local news.
- Higher-educated consumers are more likely to subscribe.
- Most respondents don't know local news is struggling financially.

LOCAL OR  
NATIONAL NEWS:  
RESPONDENTS  
WHO SUBSCRIBE,  
DONATE, OR JOIN  
MEMBERSHIP



## The unwillingness to pay for news

Many news organizations and websites rely on revenues from subscriptions, memberships and donations to fund their operations, but only a small segment of Medill survey respondents said they pay for local news. In this section, the survey looked at consumer motivations to fund the news.

While the newspaper industry once generated most of its money from display and classified advertising, the business of news looks different in the digital age. As competition has intensified and audiences have splintered, newspapers and other providers have come to rely on paywalls, subscriptions and donations to fund their operations. With Congress endorsing the Trump administration's decision to end federal funding for public TV and radio, those outlets must increase contributions from subscribers, donors and members to survive. Yet the public seems unlikely to step up.

Just 15% of respondents said in the past year they pay for local news, slightly more than the share who pay for national news (12%). These dire figures are generally in line with other

estimates, including the 2024 Medill survey, which found that 19% paid for local news.

In the digital age, consumers have become accustomed to paying subscriptions to streaming services for movies, television and music. The Pew Research Center reported recently that 83% of Americans say they watch streaming services. The hurdle for news organizations involves a legacy of the earlier digital era when news sites relied on advertising and gave away their content. With advertisers shifting away from legacy news media, news organizations are increasingly reliant on consumer revenue. But building that habit is challenging when news was made available for free online for many years.

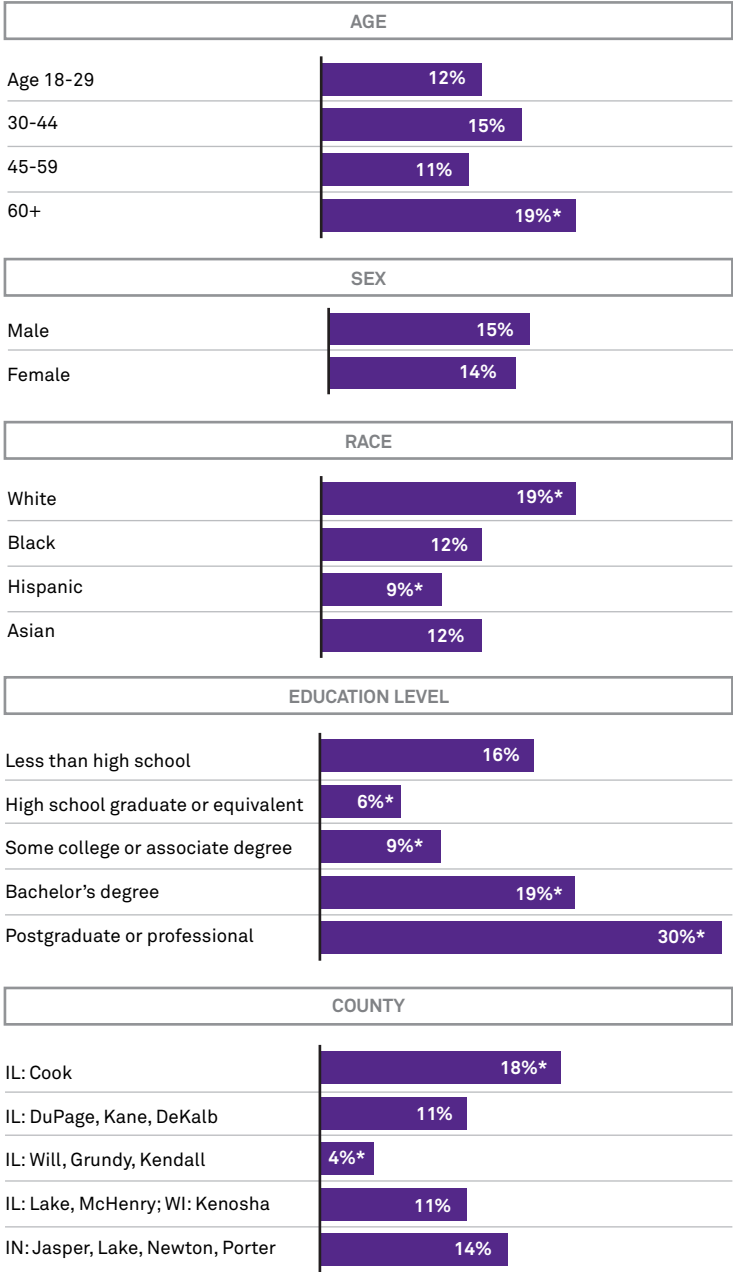
### Consumer revenue

*Declining advertising revenue puts pressure on news organizations to generate revenue directly from consumers — which has proved challenging. Tim Franklin, Medill Senior Associate Dean, Professor and John M. Mutz Chair in Local News, observed:*

“For news executives, this statistic shows that the vice is tightening. The hope was that consumer revenue would offset declines in advertising. Now they’re both under pressure. This illustrates the urgency for many news outlets to diversify their income and reimagine their cost structure. At the same time, though, news outlets don’t necessarily need a big scale of paying consumers in a digital world. They do need to cultivate an audience that is dedicated, loyal and willing to support quality journalism over time.”

DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES  
IN PAYING FOR LOCAL NEWS

% of respondents in each demographic group



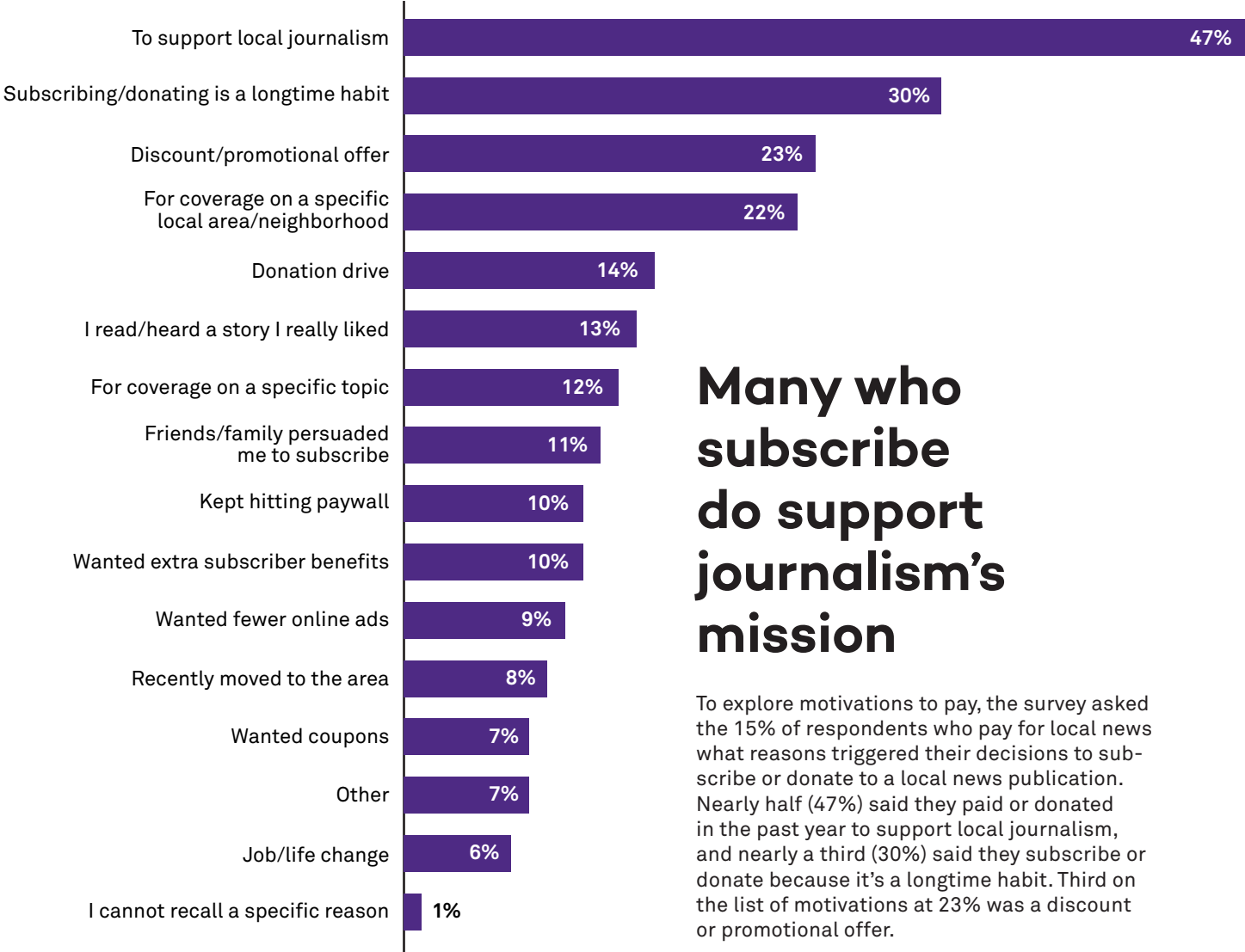
Note: \* = Denotes a statistically significant difference between respondents who belong to the given group and those who do not, at least at the 0.05 level.

When it comes to  
paying for local  
news, education  
level matters

Looking more closely at various subsets of paying consumers, one demographic stood out as being twice as likely to pay. One in three (30%) of respondents with postgraduate or professional educations said they paid for news in the past year. There may be different explanations related to higher income levels or the need for professionals to stay informed, but this is a bright spot in the survey.



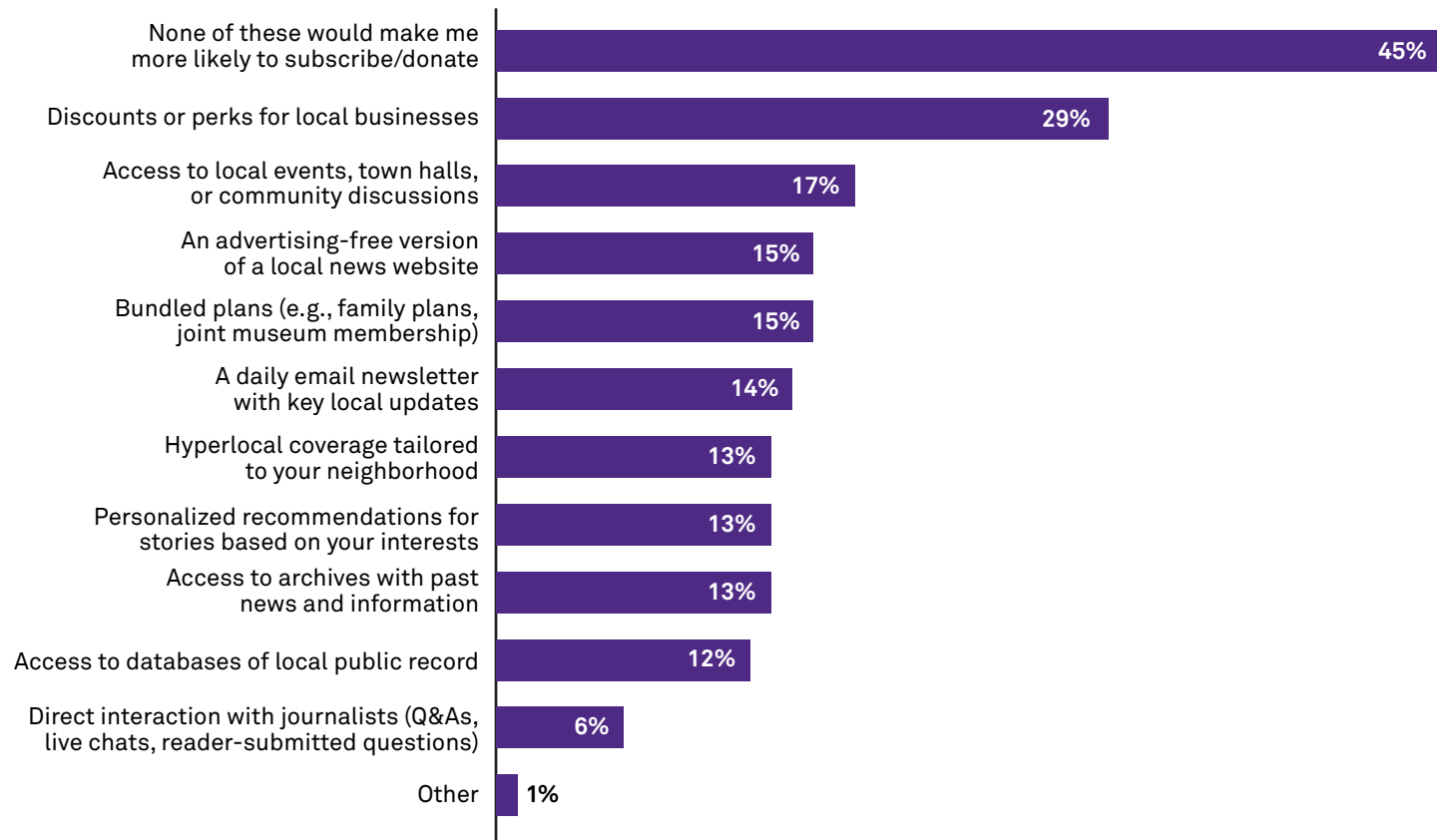
REASONS RESPONDENTS PAID FOR LOCAL NEWS IN THE PAST YEAR



NOTE: Percentages indicate a “yes” response; multiple responses permitted.

REASONS RESPONDENTS WOULD CONSIDER PAYING FOR LOCAL NEWS

Among people who said they have not paid for local news in the past year



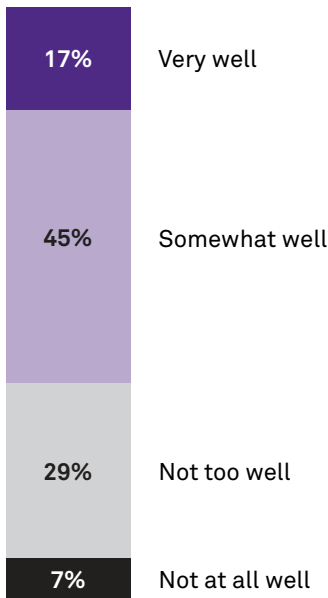
NOTE: Percentages indicate a “yes” response; multiple responses permitted.

Discounts are unlikely to fix the funding problem

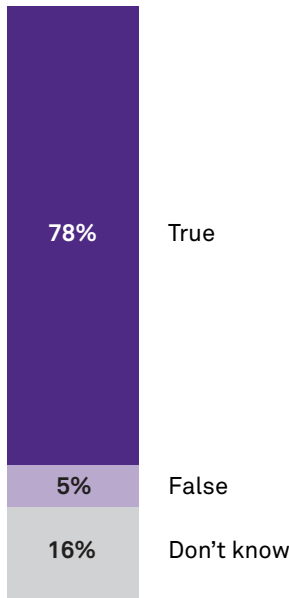
To gauge the news industry’s chances of winning new customers, the survey asked the 85% of respondents who don’t pay for news whether any of a dozen specific enticements might make them more likely to subscribe or donate. About one in three respondents (29%) said discounts or perks for local businesses might induce them to pay. No other option on the list generated significant interest, while 45% of respondents said none of the options would make them more likely to subscribe or pay.

FUNDING LOCAL NEWS

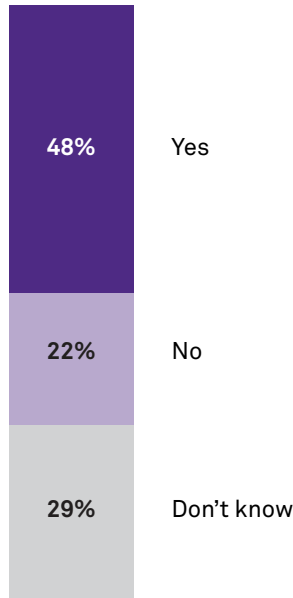
HOW RESPONDENTS  
THINK LOCAL NEWS  
OUTLETS ARE DOING  
FINANCIALLY



TRUE OR FALSE: MOST  
CITIES IN THE UNITED  
STATES HAVE FEWER  
DAILY NEWSPAPERS  
NOW THAN THEY DID  
IN THE 1990S



VIEWS ON WHETHER  
THE GOVERNMENT  
SHOULD HELP LOCAL  
NEWS OUTLETS WITH  
TAX CREDITS



NOTE: Because of rounding and the omission of missing responses, totals may not add to 100 percent.

# Two-thirds of consumers think local news is financially healthy

The survey asked two questions to gauge public understanding of the perilous financial condition of the news industry. A majority of consumers (62%) said they believe the news industry is on sound financial footing. That figure is lower than last year’s survey result, in which 71% of consumers said local news was doing very well or somewhat well. The decline suggests increased awareness of the crisis in news, but it still reflects a significant disconnect between public perception and the financial reality. As [Medill’s 2024 State of Local News](#) report noted, the newspaper industry is in dire condition, with publications disappearing at a rate of more than two per week.

As a further check on the public’s understanding of journalism, the survey asked a true/false question about whether most cities in the United States have fewer daily newspapers now than they did in

the 1990s. The majority (78%) answered correctly: It’s true. The country has lost about one-third of its newspapers in the past two decades.

### Half of adults approve of government tax credits for local news

To explore an alternate source of funding for journalism, the survey asked consumers if they approve of the government providing tax credits and other financial assistance to help local news. About half of consumers (48%) said they supported the idea, while 29% said they don’t know and 22% opposed it. Several states have passed such legislation, including Illinois. The Medill Local News Initiative recently reported that 40 news entities operating 120 outlets in the state received \$4 million in state tax credits through the Illinois law, which was enacted in 2024.

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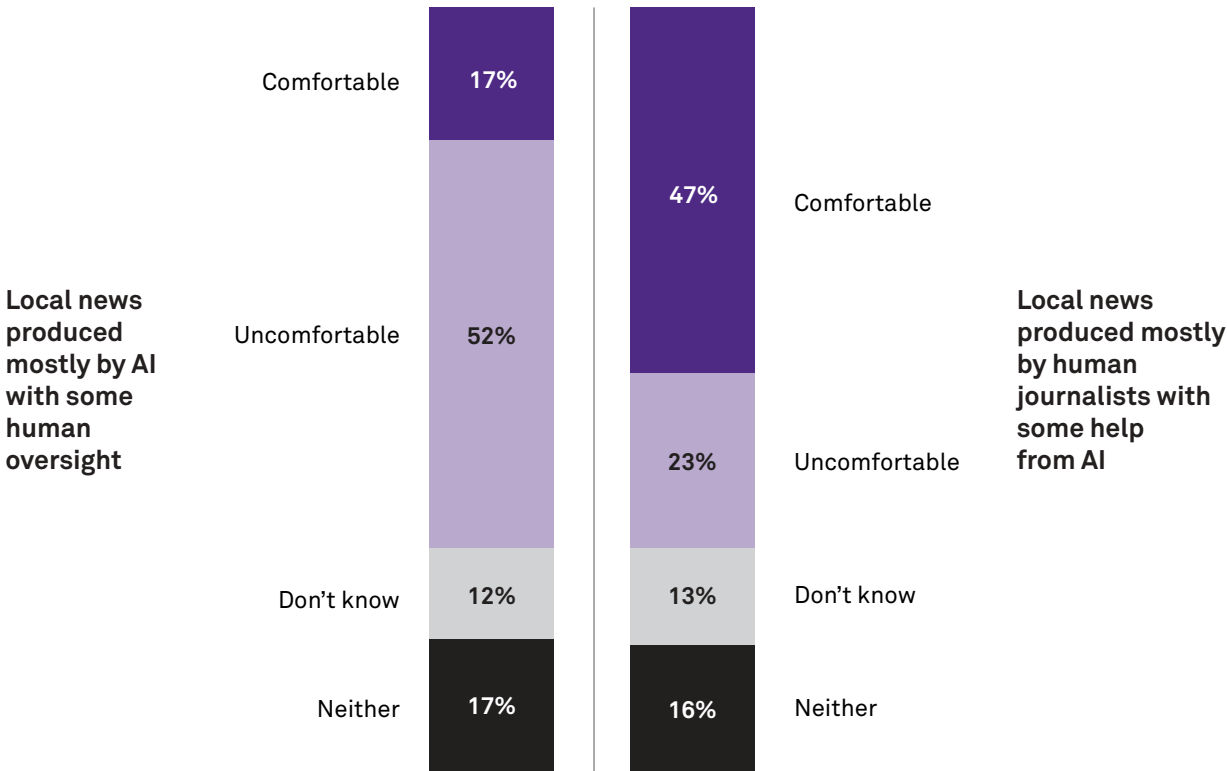


# Local news attitudes and engagement

## What we found

- Few consumers are comfortable with local news mostly produced by AI.
- Half of consumers approve of a supporting role for artificial intelligence in news.
- Consumers who have heard a lot about chatbots are more likely to be comfortable with the use of AI.
- Consumers find national news more stressful than local news to read and watch.
- Half of respondents agree local news media can be trusted to get things right.

LEVEL OF COMFORT WITH USE OF  
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN LOCAL NEWS



NOTE: Because of rounding and the omission of missing responses, totals may not add to 100 percent.

# Half of news consumers accept a limited role for artificial intelligence

While journalism has often embraced new technologies to reach audiences, the use of artificial intelligence to produce news content presents specific professional and ethical challenges. In recent years, extraordinary advancements in AI large-language model programs (LLMs) that can compile data or research and write articles have come alongside financial hardships for the news industry. This has spurred many news leaders to experiment with roles for AI, either producing content or assisting human journalists to speed efficiency.

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The Medill survey explored consumer attitudes toward the use of AI and found a significant difference in comfort level between local news produced mostly by AI and local news produced mostly by humans with assistance from AI.

The survey identified skepticism about reliance on AI. It found that about half of consumers (52%) are uncomfortable with the idea of consuming local news produced mostly by artificial intelligence. Just 17% are comfortable with the idea, and another 17% are neither comfortable nor uncomfortable.

Concerns lessen significantly when AI use is

reduced to a support role. Asked about local news produced mostly by a human journalist with some help from artificial intelligence, just under half (47%) said they would be comfortable. About one-quarter (23%) said they were uncomfortable with the idea, while 16% said they were neither comfortable nor uncomfortable.

These opinions were in line with other results, including a 2024 Reuters Institute survey. It found that about half of Americans (52%) were uncomfortable with news produced mostly by AI, while 23% said they were comfortable. When asked about news produced mostly by humans, 42% said they were comfortable, while 30% said they were uncomfortable.

### Cautious news consumers

*The use of artificial intelligence in news production is a growing trend, but consumers are very cautious about it. Tim Franklin, Medill Senior Associate Dean, Professor and John M. Mutz Chair in Local News, said:*

“For publishers or news producers who are thinking, ‘I can more efficiently have AI produce content for me,’ the survey results are a huge red flag. Maybe opinions will change over time as AI gets better, but our survey results should give news leaders pause. People don’t trust content generated by AI, at least not yet.”

### Value of clear communication

*The findings related to AI point to the importance of news organizations communicating clearly how they employ this technology, said Medill Professor Stephanie Edgerly, Associate Dean of Research:*

“People are uncomfortable with AI doing most of the news work. But if journalists are doing most of the work, while AI tidies up the edges, people are more accepting of that practice. This means that news organizations need to have clear policies about how they are using AI technology, and they need to clearly communicate this to their audience.”

# Different generations, different takes on AI

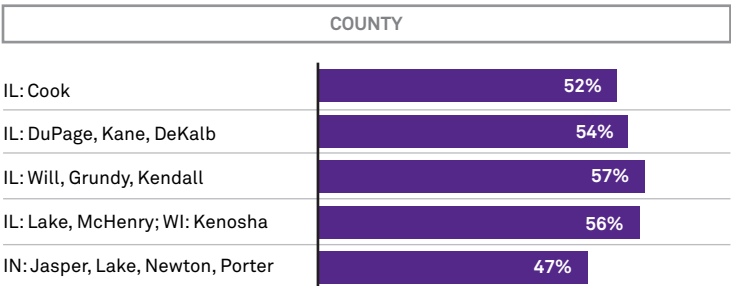
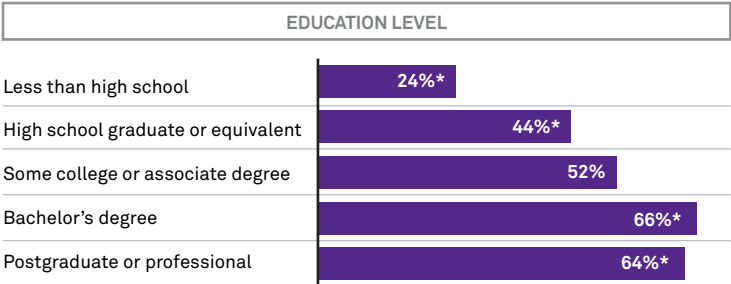
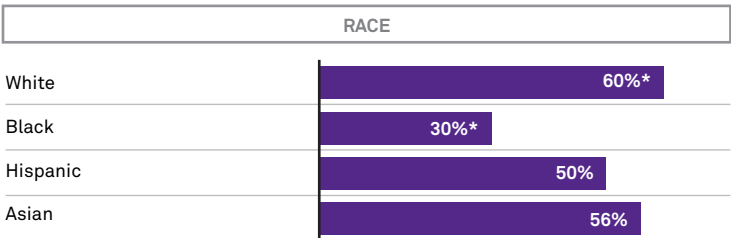
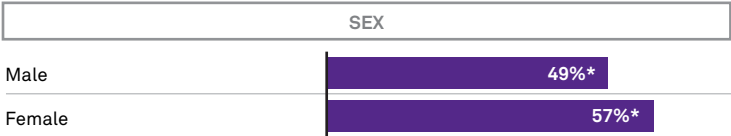
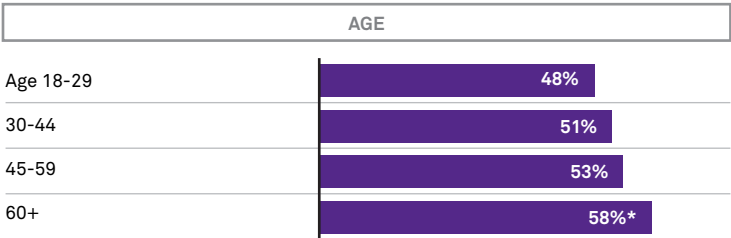
There were some opinion differences about AI usage within different demographic groups. When asked about news produced mostly by AI, the oldest group was least comfortable, with 58% of 60+ respondents saying they were uncomfortable with AI-produced news. Around half of all other adults said they were uncomfortable, including 48% of those 18-29.

Staying with the question of comfort with mostly AI-produced news, there were several other differences. Among people identifying as different races, 60% of white respondents and 56% of Asian respondents said they were uncomfortable with AI-produced news, but that number dropped to 30% among Black consumers.

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## DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN DISCOMFORT WITH LOCAL NEWS PRODUCED MOSTLY BY AI WITH SOME HUMAN OVERSIGHT

% of respondents in each demographic group



Note: \* = Denotes a statistically significant difference between respondents who belong to the given group and those who do not, at least at the 0.05 level.

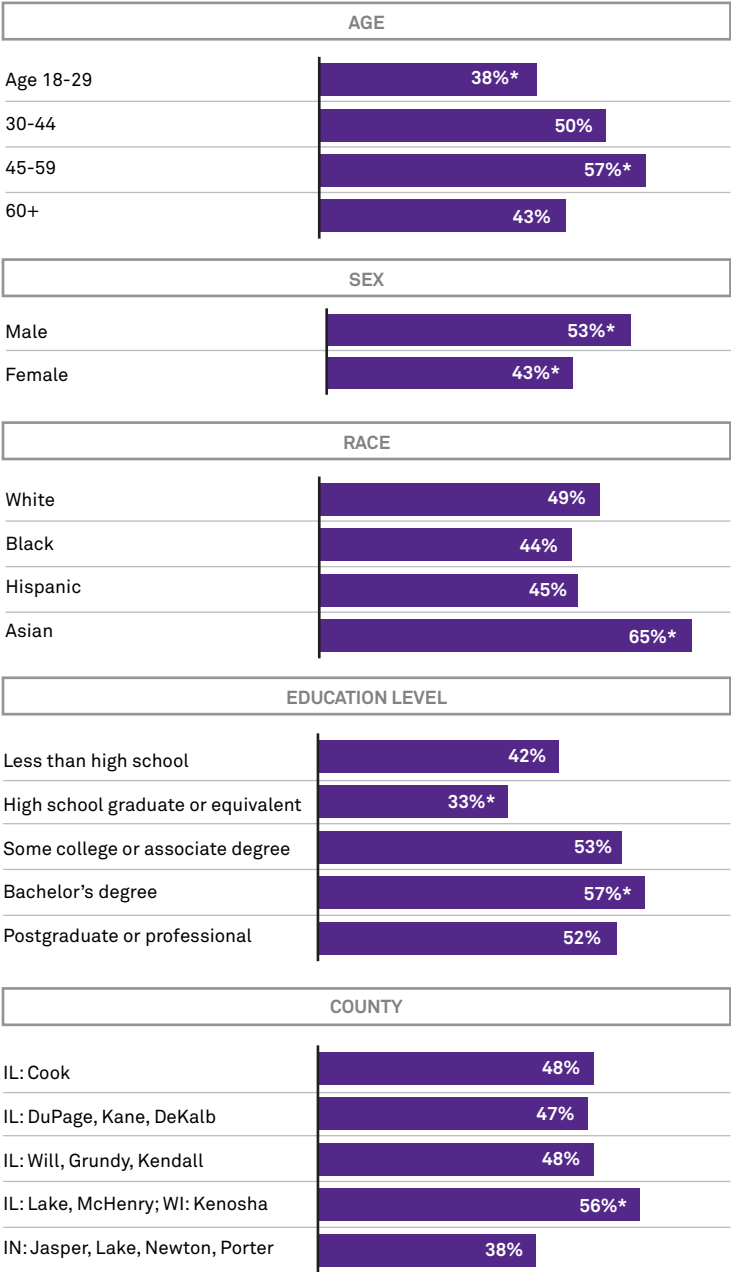
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There were differences as well depending on education level. About two-thirds of respondents with bachelor's degrees (66%) or postgraduate or professional degrees (64%) were uncomfortable. That number dropped to 24% among those with less than a high school education.

Turning to the question of news produced mostly by humans with some help from artificial intelligence, there was a stark generational difference. Gen Z (18-29) was the least comfortable (38%) with news produced mostly by humans with AI assistance, compared to 57% of people 45-59. This could be related to the experience of using AI, with younger, tech-savvy audiences recognizing AI's limitations.

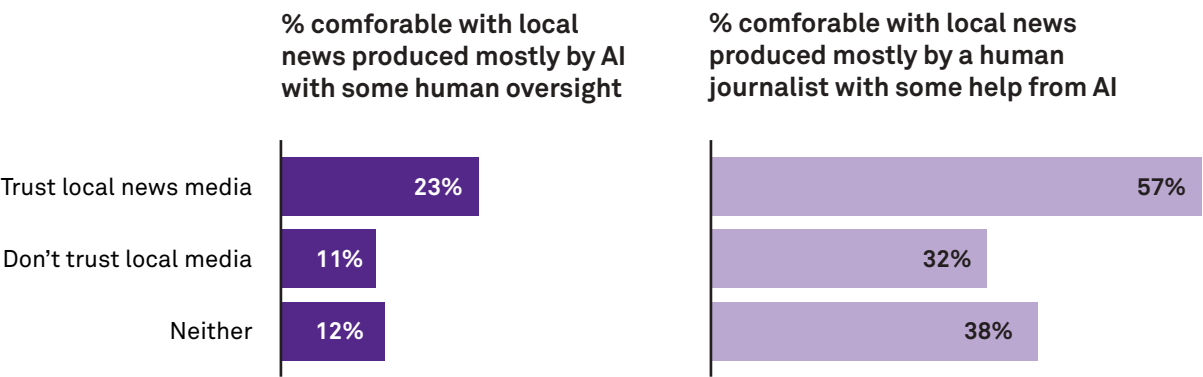
DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN COMFORT WITH LOCAL NEWS PRODUCED MOSTLY BY A HUMAN JOURNALIST WITH SOME HELP FROM AI

% of respondents in each demographic group



Note: \* = Denotes a statistically significant difference between respondents who belong to the given group and those who do not, at least at the 0.05 level.

HOW TRUST OF LOCAL NEWS MEDIA RELATES TO COMFORT WITH USE OF AI



NOTE: Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree that local news media can be trusted to get things right. Above, "Trust local news media" is among respondents who answered "agree" or "strongly agree" to the trust question; while "don't trust" is among those who answered "disagree" or "strongly disagree." Read more on this question on Page 37

AI and trust in news — a small difference appears

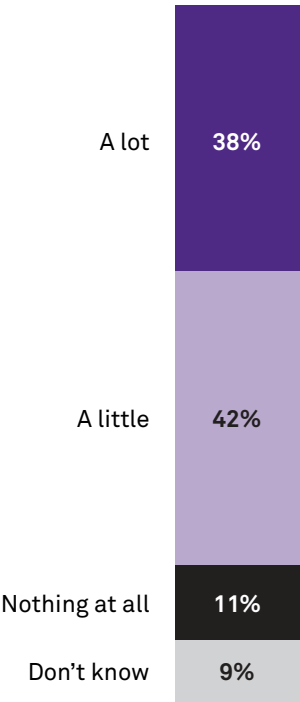
Could opinions about AI in news production be swayed by overall trust in the news media? Results showed that consumers who trust local news to get things right felt slightly more comfortable with the use of AI. Just under one-quarter of people (23%) who trust the news media said they were comfortable with news produced mostly by artificial intelligence, compared to 11% of respondents who do not trust the news media.

On the question of news created mostly by human journalists with some help from AI, 57% of those who trust local news to get things right were comfortable with AI-assisted news. About one-third (32%) of respondents who do not trust local news said they were comfortable with mostly human-produced news.

Note: The percentage for trust local news represents the total of those who answered agree / strongly agree.

HOW MUCH  
RESPONDENTS  
HAVE HEARD  
ABOUT CHATGPT

NOTE: Because of rounding  
and the omission of missing  
responses, totals may not add  
to 100 percent.



Familiarity  
with AI slightly  
improves  
comfort levels

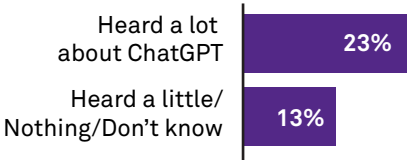
To gauge familiarity with AI, the survey asked about a prominent chatbot, ChatGPT, and found it is not top of mind for everyone. More than half of respondents (53%) said they knew a little or nothing about the large-language model chatbot, while 38% said they know a lot. Understanding this breakdown is the starting point for a deeper analysis of opinions about one of the best-known chatbots.

Consumers who have heard a lot about ChatGPT were more likely to be comfortable with its use in news. More than half (53%) of consumers who know a lot about ChatGPT were comfortable with news produced by human journalists with help from AI. This was an increase over the 47% figure for all respondents.

Only about one-quarter (23%) of consumers who know a lot about ChatGPT said they were comfortable with mostly AI-produced local news. Just 13% of consumers who have heard little or nothing about ChatGPT were comfortable with mostly AI-produced news. Overall, people who know about artificial intelligence are at least a little more inclined to be comfortable with its use.

RESPONDENTS' COMFORT WITH  
USE OF AI IN LOCAL NEWS BY  
HOW MUCH THEY HEARD ABOUT  
CHATGPT

% comfortable with local news produced mostly  
by AI with some human oversight

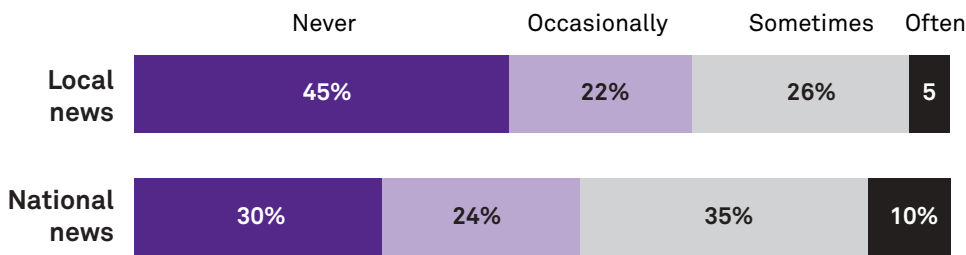


% comfortable with local news produced mostly  
by a human journalist with some help from AI

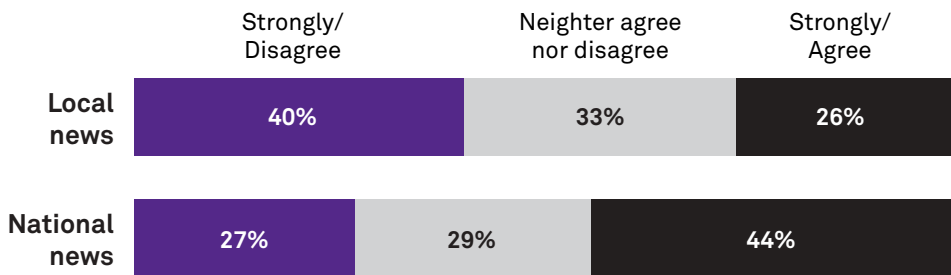




WHETHER RESPONDENTS FIND THEMSELVES ACTIVELY AVOIDING NEWS



AGREE OR DISAGREE: NEWS IS TOO STRESSFUL TO READ OR WATCH



NOTE: Because of rounding and the omission of missing responses, totals may not add to 100 percent.

Local news fares better than national when it comes to avoidance and stress

In the social media age at a time of rancorous politics, the public may feel there is little escape from news, or from people’s opinions about the issues of the day. Managing the discord and keeping a healthy, balanced perspective can be a challenge for many when the news cycle never seems to stop. But how much do consumers struggle to cope, and do they seek to shut out the noise? According to a [global survey by the Reuters Institute](#), 39% of people said they sometimes or often avoid the news, an increase from 36% in 2023 and 29% in 2017. Addressing a more specific question, the Pew Research Center found that 62% of Americans were worn out by how much election coverage there was.

The Medill survey took on the topics of news avoidance and stress to see how Chicago metropolitan area residents manage news

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consumption challenges, and to measure if they have different feelings about local news vs. national news. The results show that consumers find local news easier to deal with than national news.

Respondents said they were much more likely to avoid national news than local news. Close to half of adults (45%) said they sometimes or often try to avoid national news, while 31% said they sometimes or often try to avoid local news.

More generally, 44% of respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed that national news is too stressful to read or watch. By comparison, just 26% of respondents said local news is too stressful to read or watch.

The difference in public attitudes may open opportunities for local news organizations to distinguish themselves in approaches to keep audiences engaged.



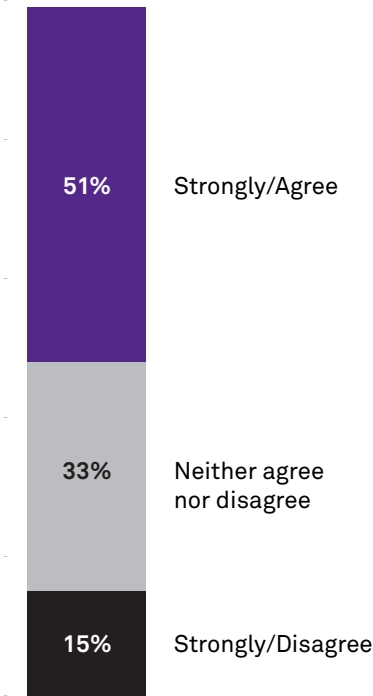
## **An opportunity for local news to distinguish itself**

*Consumer fatigue with national news should put some pressure on local news outlets to react. Medill Professor Stephanie Edgerly, Associate Dean of Research, said:*

“High national news fatigue is a challenge and opportunity for local news organizations. On one hand, it’s a problem if people are so fatigued that they check out of all news. On the other hand, it can be an opportunity for local news to differentiate itself and keep audiences engaged. If national news is seen as being all doom, gloom, and stress, then local can be a source for stories that give people joy and leave them feeling more hopeful about their community.”

AGREE OR DISAGREE: LOCAL NEWS MEDIA CAN BE TRUSTED TO GET THINGS RIGHT

NOTE: Because of rounding and the omission of missing responses, totals may not add to 100 percent.



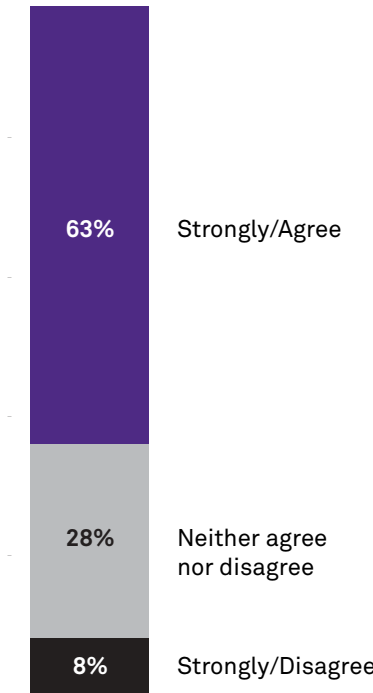
Chicago-area consumers trust local news media

Trust is the bedrock of the news industry’s relationship with the public, but that relationship is in trouble. Nationally, trust in journalists to report the news fairly and withhold bias has eroded significantly as politics has become more divisive. The story is different for local news. Chicago-area residents expressed a more positive opinion about local news organizations.

About half (51%) of people surveyed by Medill agree, or strongly agree, that local news media can be trusted to get things right. That figure was about the same as in the 2024 Medill survey (53%).

AGREE OR DISAGREE: I HAVE ACCESS TO NEWS THAT IS RELEVANT TO MY LIFE

NOTE: Because of rounding and the omission of missing responses, totals may not add to 100 percent.



A majority say Chicago-area news media is relevant

The survey asked consumers if they have access to local news that is relevant to their lives. The answer suggests that Chicago-area news media in general are successful in this fundamental goal. Nearly two-thirds (63%) agree or strongly agree that local news is relevant. Just 8% disagree or strongly disagree, while 28% neither agree nor disagree.

**THE MEDILL SURVEY 2025:  
HOW THE CHICAGO AREA  
GETS ITS NEWS  
SEPTEMBER 2025**



# Methodology



# How the survey was conducted

This study was designed by researchers at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications to understand how local news is being consumed in the greater Chicago area. The project was supported by a grant from the Robert R. McCormick Foundation and conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago, an independent social research organization.

For the purpose of this study, the greater Chicago area was defined by the 14 counties comprising the Chicago Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). This includes nine counties in the state of Illinois, four counties in northwest Indiana, and one county in southeast Wisconsin. The outlying areas are within about 70 miles of the Chicago city border.

The survey of 1,101 Chicagoland residents took place from May 22 to June 16, 2025. The sample of adults age 18+ who live in the Chicago MSA was selected from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak panel (n = 795) and from Dynata's non-probability panel (n = 306). Respondents who confirmed that they reside in the Chicago MSA met the screening criteria were allowed to participate. The questionnaire was self-administrated online and available in English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference. The median time to complete was 15 minutes.

The probability sample was selected from the AmeriSpeak Panel, NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, nonzero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone and field interviewers (face-to-face). The AmeriSpeak Panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. box-only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

For the probability sample, all AmeriSpeak panelists who reside in the Chicago MSA were invited to take the survey. If a panel household had more than one active adult panel member, only one adult panel member was selected at random. AmeriSpeak panelists who previously participated in the 2024 local news study were invited to again provide their responses for the 2025 study. In total, 457 of the 795 AmeriSpeak panelists (57%, or 42%



of the 2025 sample) participated in both waves. For these people only, we have matched panel data across two years. Results from this subsample of panelists are not formally presented in this study. Instead we treat each year separately as a cross-section snapshot.

For the non-probability sample, NORC defined quota buckets for demographic strata to reflect known population distributions for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education and the regions of Chicago MSA. NORC worked with Dynata to slowly release sample over the field period to adequately fill each.

The final sample of 1,101 Chicagoland residents does not include cases that were removed due to quality-control checks. NORC removed 41 cases from the final sample for speeding (i.e., those who completed the survey is less than one-third of the median duration), high refusal rates (i.e., those who skipped or refused more than 50% of the eligible questions) or straight-liners (i.e., those who straight-lined all of the grid questions they were shown). Additionally, two attention-check questions were asked of Dynata respondents in their battery of demographic questions. Any Dynata respondents who failed either attention check was not allowed to participate in the survey.

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SURVEY SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics	Chicago MSA sample (%)
<b>Age</b>	
18-29	18.8
30-44	26.8
45-59	25.2
60+	29.2
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	48.6
Female	51.4
<b>Race / Ethnicity<sup>2</sup></b>	
White	52
Black	15
Hispanic	24.1
Asian-Pacific Islander	5.5
Other	3.4
<b>Education</b>	
Less than high school	7.6
High school graduate or equivalent	26.4
Some college or associate degree	25.8
Bachelor's degree	22.1
Postgraduate or professional	18.1
<b>Income</b>	
Less than \$30,000	22.3
\$30,000 to under \$60,000	23.6
\$60,000 to under \$100,000	20.9
\$100,000 or more	33.1
<b>County groups</b>	
Cook	54.7
Will, Grundy, Kendall	15.9
DuPage, Kane, DeKalb	9.3
IL: Lake, McHenry; WI: Kenosha	11.6
IN: Jasper, Lake, Newton, Porter	8.5

Notes: Values are weighed percentages. Categories may not total to 100% due to rounding and respondents who indicated they did not know the answer or refused to answer the question.

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The final sample is weighted to the Chicagoland population using NORC's TrueNorth® Calibration<sup>1</sup>. The weights were developed in three steps. First, NORC fit a weighted tree model to the combined probability and nonprobability sample. Second, based on the fitted tree model, they estimated the probabilities of inclusion in the combined probability and nonprobability sample and computed the initial weights as the inverse of the estimated probabilities. Third, poststratification adjustments, including calibration to benchmarks and weight trimming, were made to the initial weights to create the final weights. NORC provided additional weights to balance demographic distributions within the Chicago MSA by the following county groupings:

- 1. Cook, IL
- 2. DuPage, IL, Grundy, IL, McHenry, IL, Will, IL
- 3. DeKalb, IL, Kane, IL, Kendall, IL, Jasper, IN, Lake, IN, Newton, IN, Porter, IN, Lake, IL, Kenosha, WI.

All analyses in this report were performed using the Chicago MSA weighting.

The overall margin of error for the combined weighted sample is +/- 4.72 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. Estimates based on subgroups have larger margins of error. It is important to note that sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in a survey. Other sources, such as question wording and reporting inaccuracy, may contribute additional error. Any direct comparisons between the 2024 and 2025 surveys should consider the margin of error from both reports.

<sup>1</sup>More on TrueNorth Calibration can also be found here: <https://amerispeak.norc.org/us/en/amerispeak/our-capabilities/truenorth.html>

<sup>2</sup> White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanic adults are of any race; Other includes those who selected “other” for race/ethnicity (0.4%) and those that selected multiple races, non-Hispanic (3%).



# Northwestern

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MEDILL

Local News Initiative

[localnewsinitiative.northwestern.edu](http://localnewsinitiative.northwestern.edu)