

AMERICAN PUBLIC SQUARE

FAKE NEWS FACT SHEET

Definitions

“Fake news” is much more than false news stories. Some stories may have a nugget of truth, but lack any contextualizing details. They may not include any verifiable facts or sources. Some stories may include basic verifiable facts, but are written using language that is deliberately inflammatory, leaves out pertinent details or only presents one viewpoint. “Fake news” exists within a larger ecosystem of **mis- and disinformation**.

Misinformation is false or inaccurate information that is mistakenly or inadvertently created or spread; the intent is not to deceive. Disinformation is false information that is deliberately created and spread “in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth” [Source](#)

fake news

noun

False stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke. [Source](#)

disinformation

noun

False information deliberately and often covertly spread in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth. [Source](#)

AMERICANS & MEDIA

- Republicans who say they have trust in the media has plummeted to 14% in 2016 from 32% in 2015.
- Democrats’ trust in the media has declined from 55% in 2015 to 51% in 2016.
- Independents’ trust in the media has declined from 33% in 2015 to 30% in 2016. [Source](#)
- Older Americans are more likely than younger Americans to say they trust the media, but trust declined among both age groups in 2016.
 - 26% of those aged 18 to 49 (down from 36% in 2015) say they have a “great deal or fair amount” of trust in the media in 2016.
 - 38% of those aged 50 and older (down from 45% in 2015) say they have a “great deal or fair amount” of trust in the media in 2016.
- Stanford University: A common finding in a survey of literature on rumors, conspiracy theories, and factual beliefs is that partisan attachment is an important predictor of beliefs. For example, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to believe that President Obama was born outside the United States, and Democrats are more likely than Republicans to believe that President Bush was complicit in the 9/11 attacks. [Source](#) (page 228-9)
- As of 2017, 93% of Americans say they receive news online. [Source](#)
 - 36% use a website or app
 - 62% use social media [Source](#) (page 223)
 - 55% of smartphone users receive news alerts on their devices.

- Interest in national news has increased in Democrats from 33% in 2016 and 49% in 2017 and in Independents from 32% in 2016 and 35% in 2017. (Interest in national news has not increased or decreased among Republicans). [Source](#)
- In 2018, 78% of Americans say it is never acceptable for a news organization to favor one political party over others when reporting the news. [Source](#)
- In 2017, 89% of Democrats say news media criticism keeps leaders in line as the “watchdog role,” while only 42% of Republicans say the same. *This percentage gap is the largest recorded between Republicans and Democrats since data collection on this topic began in 1985.* [Source](#)

- **Local TV News**

- [Source](#)

- In 2016, viewership for network local affiliate news stations (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC) declined in key time slots – morning, early evening and late night.
- Since 2007, the average audience for late night newscasts has declined 31%, while morning audience declined 12% and early evening audience fell 19%. Local TV noon and 7 p.m. news viewership also declined.

- **Network News**

- [Source](#)

- Combined average viewership for the ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts remained stable, down 1% in 2016, staying at about 24 million.

- **Newspapers**

- [Source](#)

- The estimated total U.S. daily newspaper circulation (print and digital combined) in 2016 was 35 million for weekday and 38 million for Sunday, both of which fell 8% over the previous year. Declines were highest in print circulation: Weekday print circulation decreased 10% and Sunday circulation decreased 9%.
- Beyond daily newspapers, many U.S. cities have what are known as “alt-weekly” papers – weekly newspapers, generally distributed for free, which put a heavy focus on arts and culture. Average circulation for the top 20 U.S. alt-weekly papers is just over 61,000, a 6% decline from 2015.

- **Digital News**

- [Source](#)

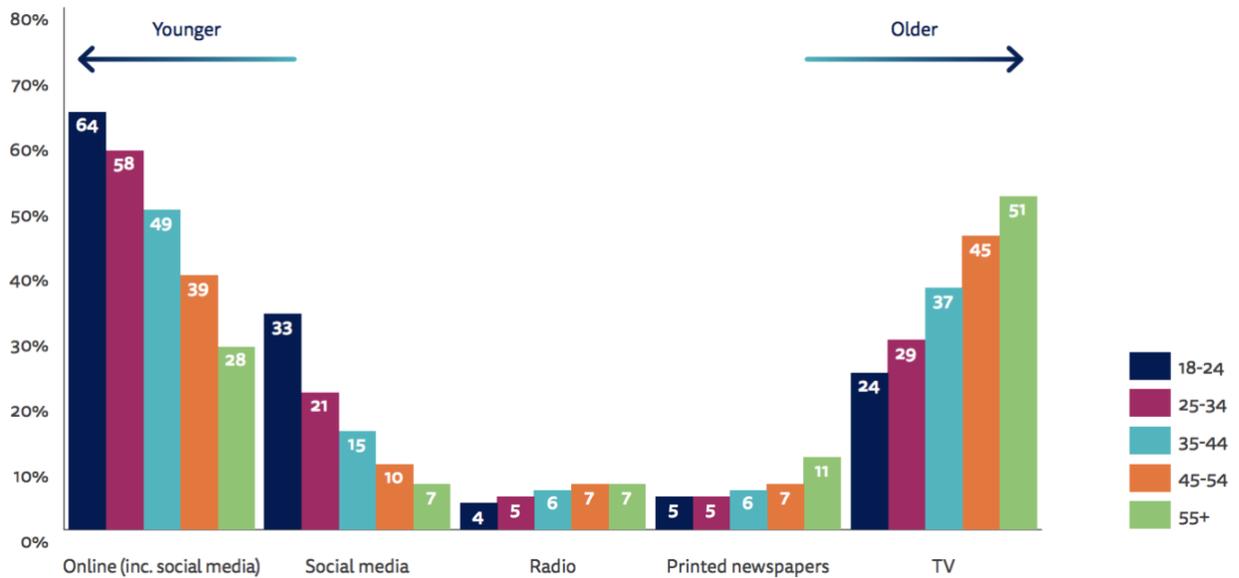
- In the U.S., roughly nine-in-ten adults (93%) get news online (either via mobile or desktop), and the online space has become a host for the digital homes of both legacy news outlets and new, “born on the web” news outlets.

- **Public Broadcasting**

- [Source](#)

- The top 20 NPR-affiliated public radio stations (by listenership) had on average a total weekly listenership of about 10 million in 2016, up from about 9 million in 2015.

MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS BY AGE – ALL MARKETS



[Source](#) (page 10-11)

Top 10 Most Popular Online News Sources—2011-2017

2011 Source	2017
1. Yahoo! News	1. Yahoo! News
2. CNN	2. Huffington Post
3. MSNBC	3. CNN
4. AOL News	4. Fox News
5. New York Times	5. New York Times
6. Fox News	6. Local News
7. ABC News	7. BuzzFeed News
8. The Huffington Post	8. Washington Post
9. Google News	9. Local Newspaper
10. Washington Post	10. MSN News

Top 10 Recommended Online News Sources by *Forbes* [Source](#)

1. New York Times
2. Wall Street Journal
3. Washington Post
4. BBC
5. The Economist
6. The New Yorker
7. The Associated Press, Reuters, Bloomberg News
8. Foreign Affairs
9. The Atlantic
10. Politico

THREAT OF FAKE NEWS

[Source](#)

- In 2016, 64% of U.S. adults say fabricated news stories cause “a great deal of confusion about the basic facts of current issues and events.”
- 23% of Americans say they have shared a made-up news story, whether knowingly or not.
- 45% of U.S. adults say government, politicians and elected officials bear a great deal of responsibility for preventing made-up stories.
- Although Americans rely heavily on social media for their news, only about 5% of U.S. adults have a lot of trust in the information they get there in 2017. [Source](#)
- There are 149 “fact checking” projects in 53 countries in 2018; up from 114 in 2017. [Source](#)
- In 2017, 262 journalists around the world were jailed for their work with the most being in Turkey, China, and Egypt. [Source](#)

FAKE NEWS IN THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

[Source \(page 5\)](#)

- On Twitter, supporters of Trump shared 95% of the fake news sites and accounted for 55% of fake news traffic in a survey sample done by the Computational Propaganda Research Project on the 2016 Presidential Election. (Other kinds of audiences shared content from these junk news sources, but at much lower levels.)
- On Facebook, conservative groups shared 91% of the junk news sites on the watch list, and accounted for 58% of junk news traffic in the sample survey. This means that on average, political groups on Twitter share 54% of the junk news watch list and groups of Facebook users share 33%.
- 27.4% of Americans (65 million) age 18 or older visited an article on a pro-Trump or pro-Clinton fake news website during the final weeks of the 2016 election campaign. [Source](#)
- Since the 2016 election, President Trump has used the phrase “fake news” in tweets and speeches 358 times and the word “fake” 462 times. (As of March 8, 2018) [Source](#)