

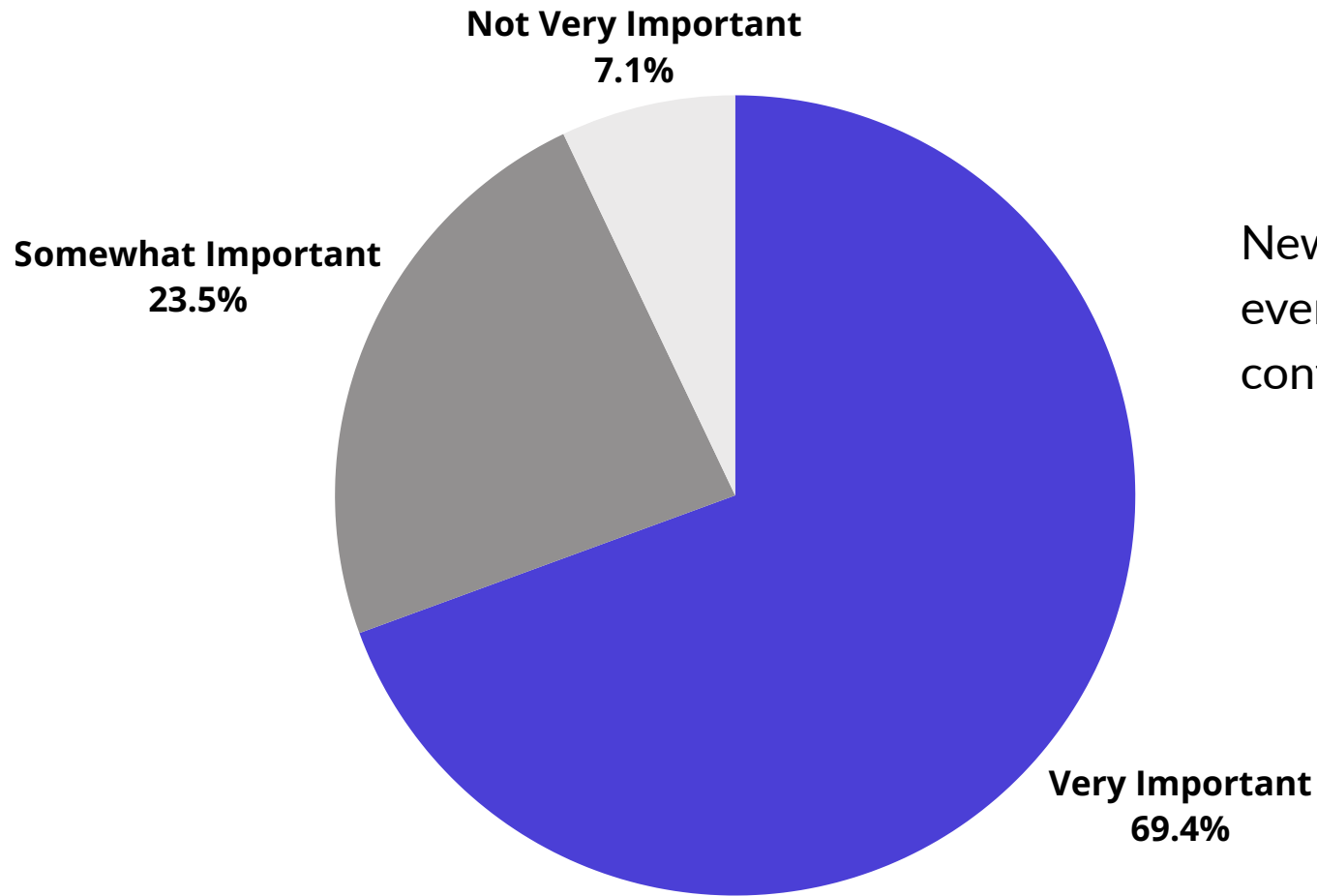
# **Public Survey Results**

## **The Role of News in Democracy Today**

**Fair Media Council**

# Nearly 70% Say News Is Very Important

*How important is news media in your everyday life?*



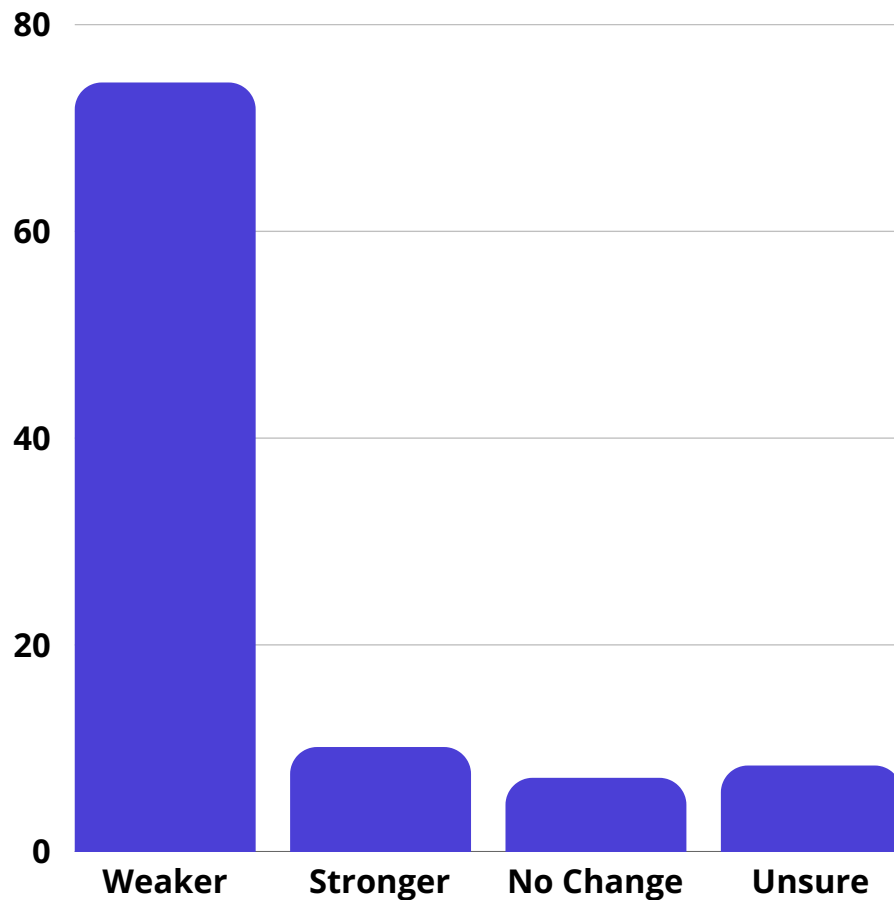
News remains central to daily life—even as criticism of the media continues.

# **Views on News and Democracy Move Together**

Public perceptions of the news media closely track how people view the health of democracy.

# Majority Say American Democracy Is Weaker

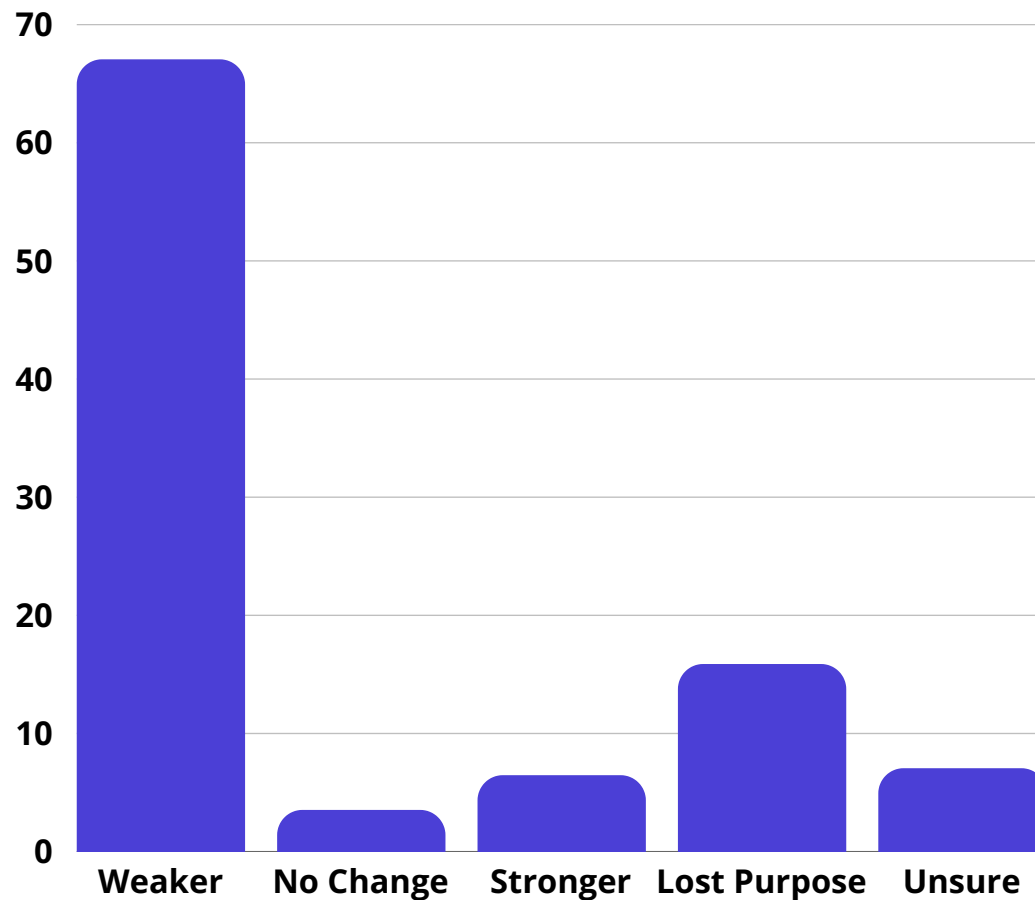
*How would you describe the current state of American democracy?*



Nearly three-quarters of respondents say American democracy is weaker today, with minimal support for the view that it is stronger.

# Public Sees News Media Weak and Losing Purpose

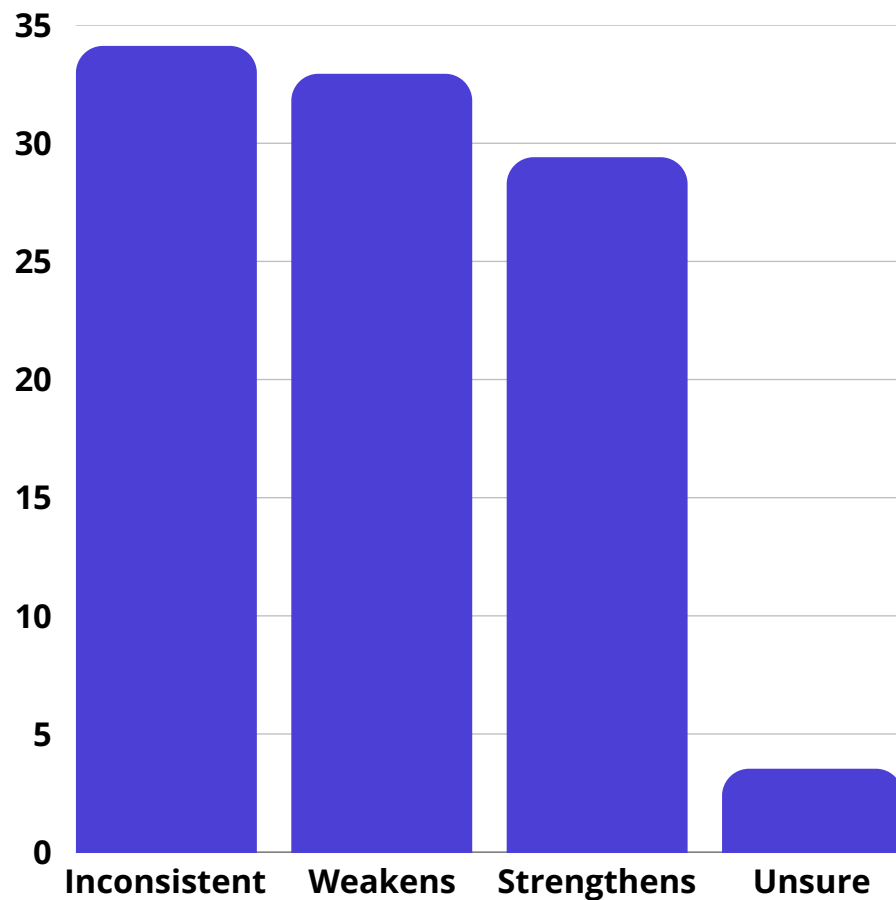
*How would you describe the current state of the American news media?*



Most respondents say the news media is weaker today and are pessimistic about its strength, with nearly 16 percent indicating it has lost its sense of purpose.

# Perceived Impact of News on Democracy Is Largely Negative

*What is the news media's role in democracy today?*

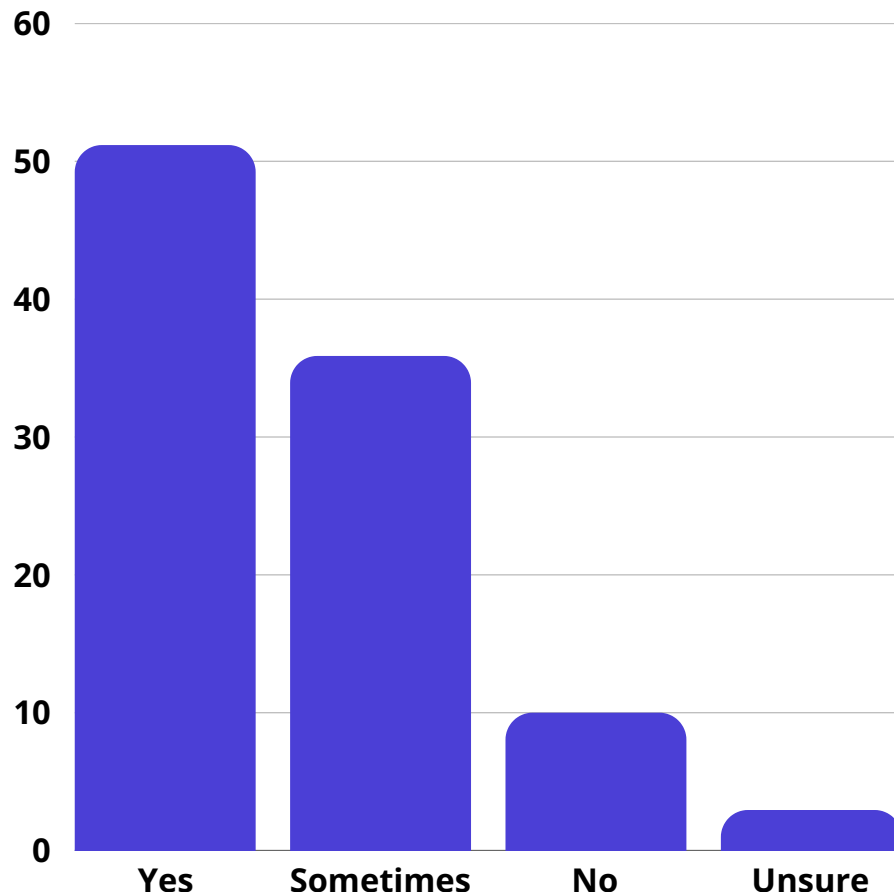


Responses cluster around “inconsistent” and “weakens,” with nearly 70% indicating a predominantly negative view of news media’s impact on democracy.

# **What People Expect from Journalism**

# Bias-Free Reporting Seen as Possible and Desirable

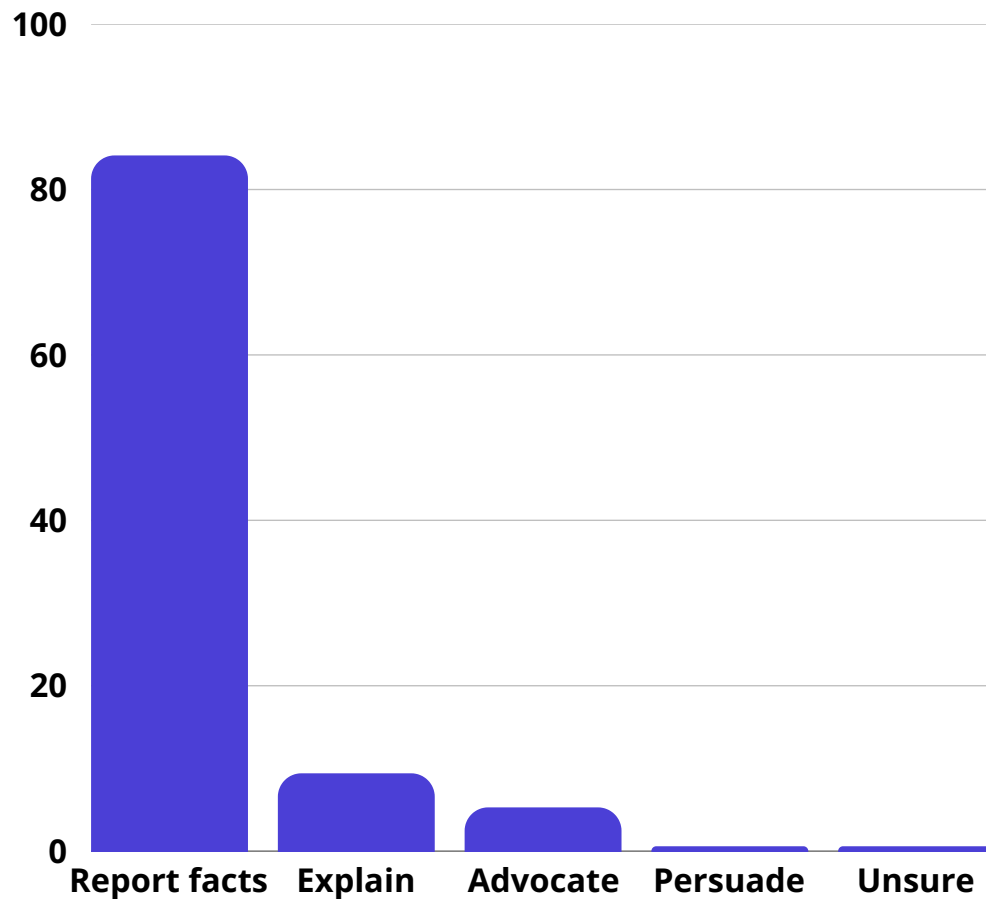
*Can a story be reported without bias?*



While a majority believe stories can be reported without bias, a significant share – about 36 percent – say bias-free reporting depends on how the story is covered. Only 10% believe every story reflects an agenda or point of view.

# A Journalist's Role, According to the Public: Report the Facts

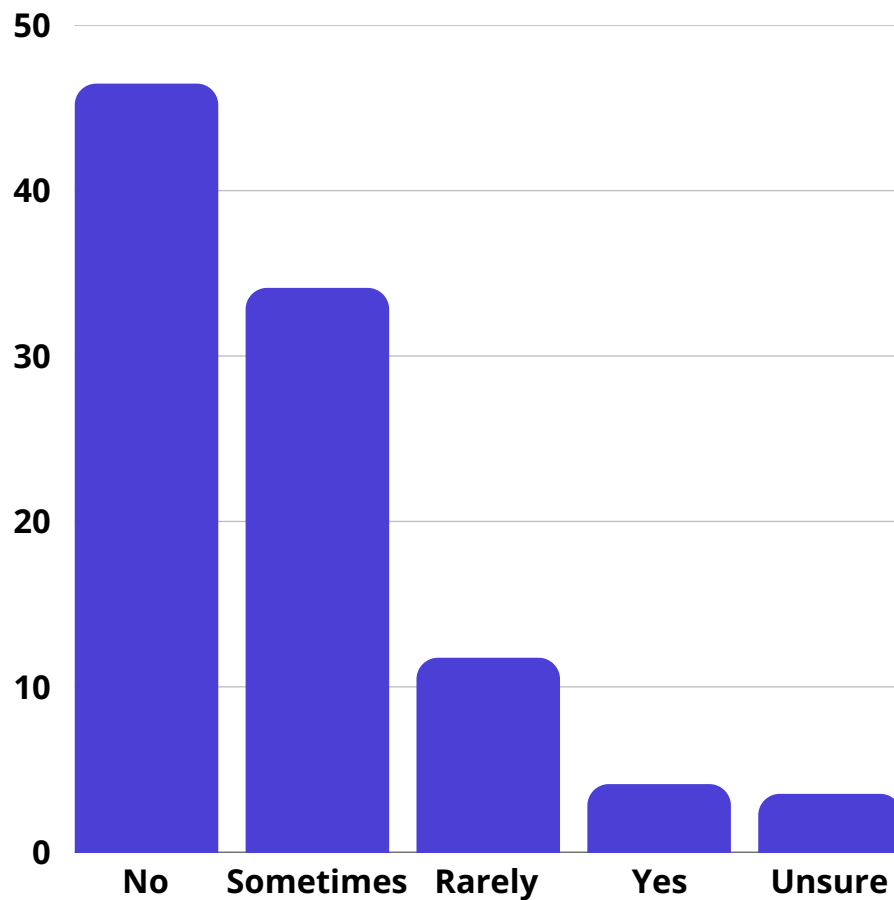
*Which best describes a journalist's role?*



An overwhelming majority say a journalist's primary role is to report facts, with little support for interpretive or advocacy-based approaches.

# Reporters Seen as Separate from the Story, With Limited Exceptions

*Should reporters be part of the stories they cover?*

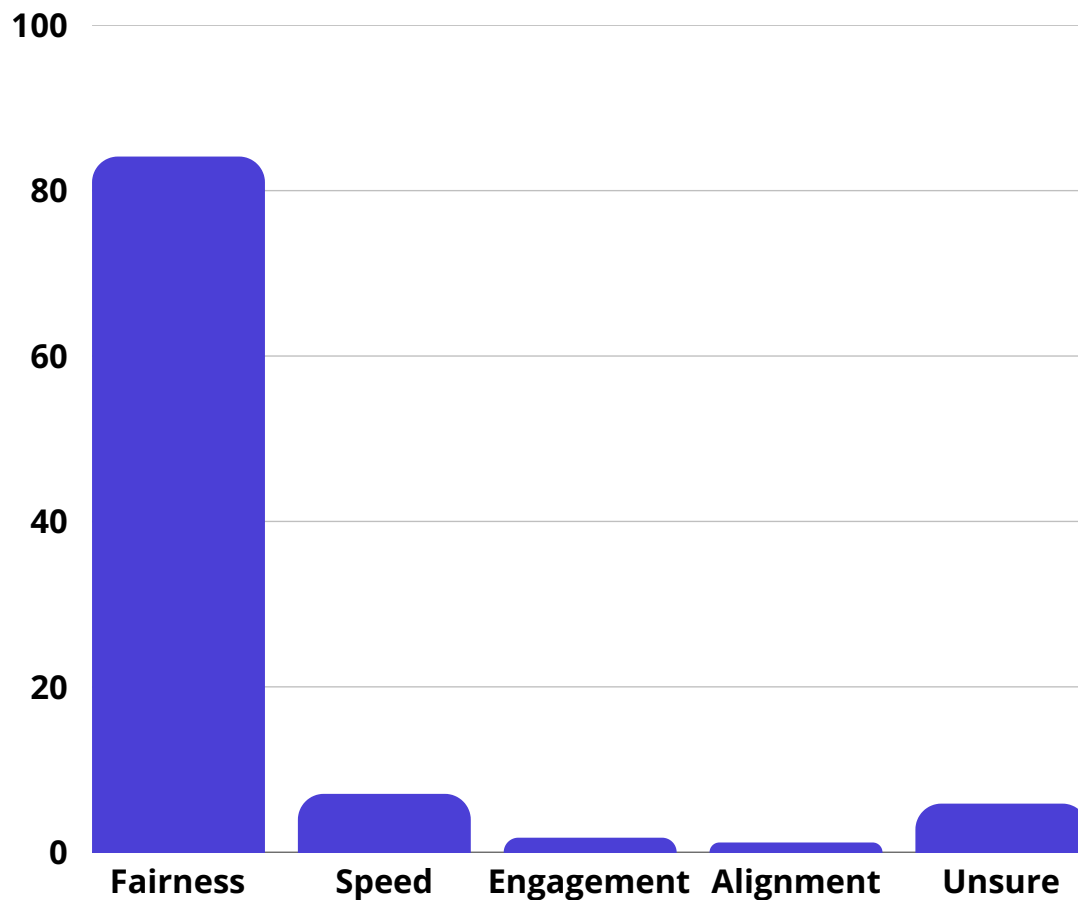


Most respondents say reporters should not be part of the stories they cover, though a substantial share of 34% believe there are situations where it may be appropriate.

# **What People Want From News**

# For News Consumers, Fairness Comes First

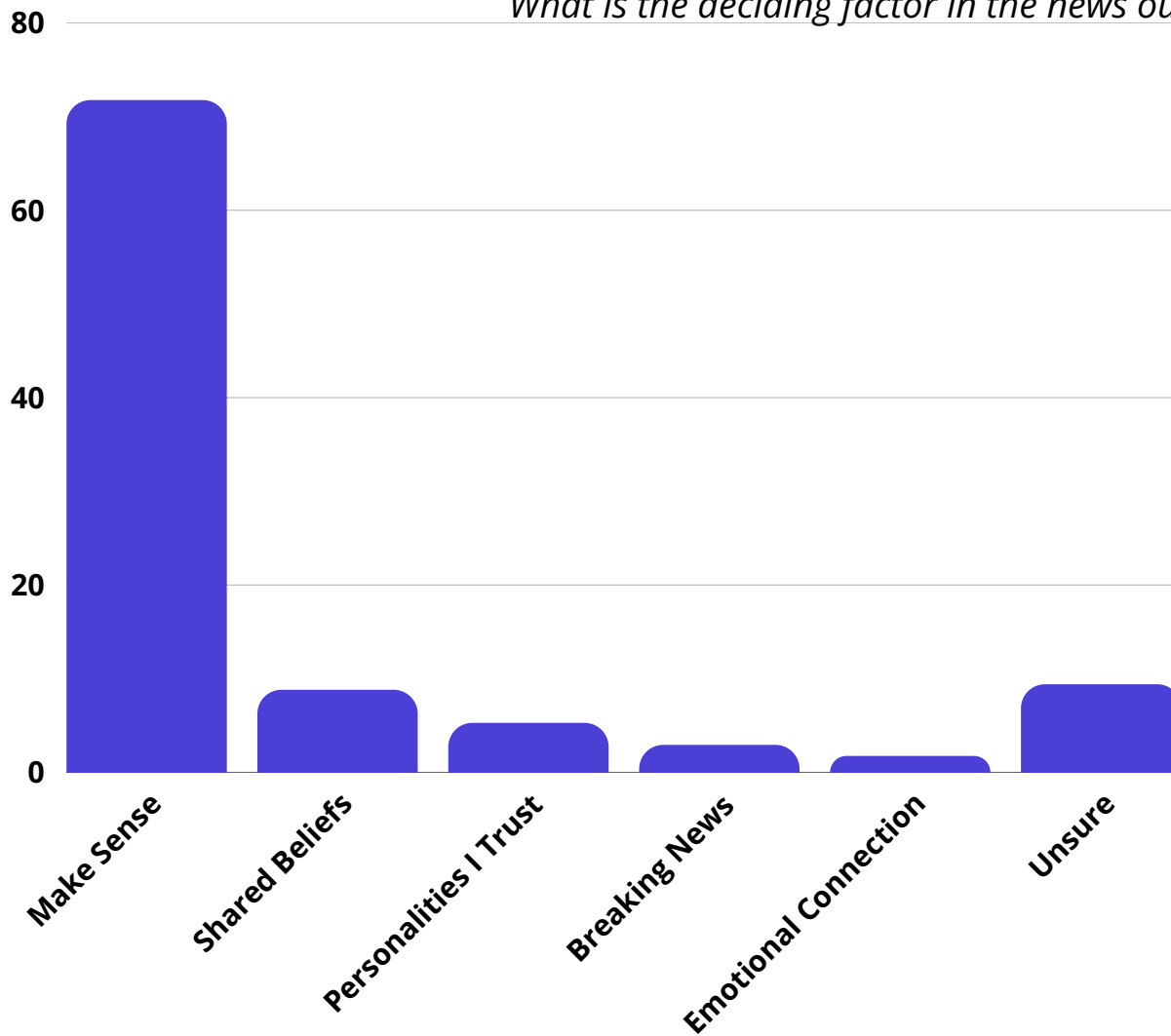
*Which of these matters the most to you as a news consumer?*



An overwhelming majority of nearly 85% say fairness matters most when consuming news, with other factors such as speed, engagement, and alignment trailing far behind.

# Clarity Drives Which News Outlets People Follow

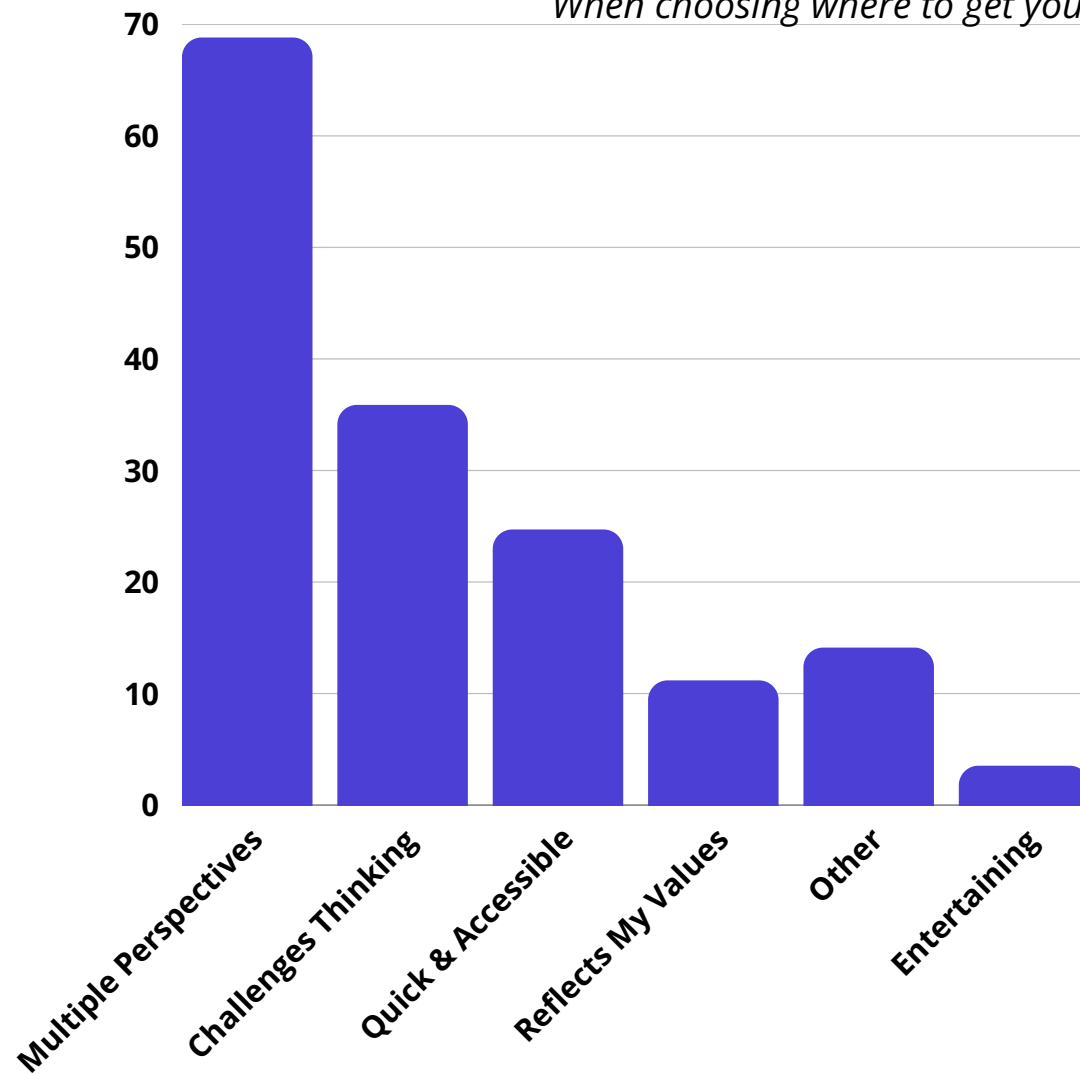
*What is the deciding factor in the news outlets you follow?*



A clear majority of 72% say they choose news outlets that help them make sense of issues, far outweighing factors like shared beliefs, trust, or emotional connection.

# News Consumers Prioritize Multiple Perspectives and Challenging Thinking

*When choosing where to get your news, what matters most to you?*

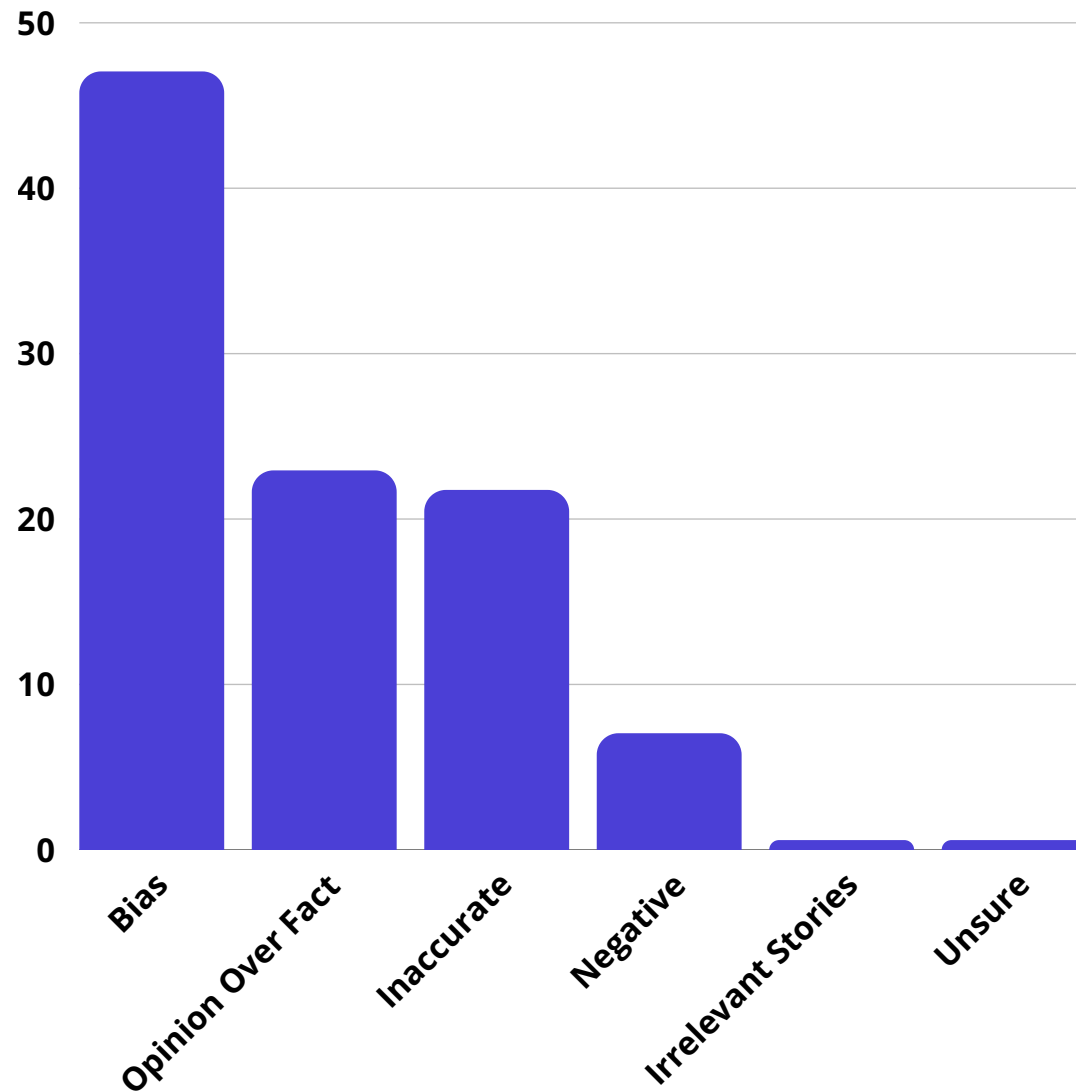


Consumers prioritize access to multiple perspectives, with a strong secondary emphasis on news that challenges their thinking. Factors like convenience and personal alignment trail behind.

# **What Breaks Public Trust**

# Bias, Inaccuracy, and Opinion Push Audiences Away

*What makes you stop following a news outlet?*

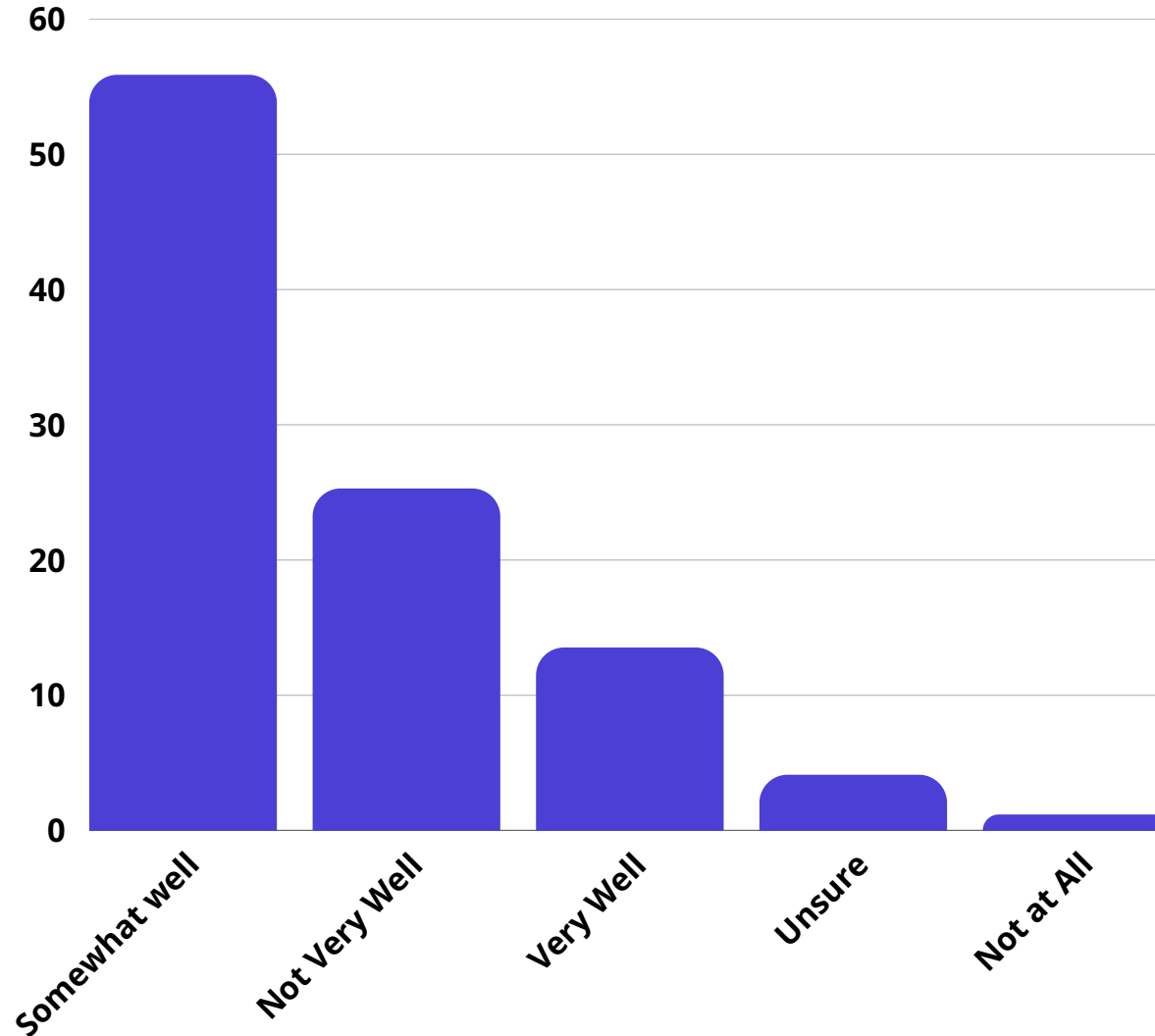


Bias is the leading reason people disengage from a news outlet, followed closely by concerns about opinion-driven news and inaccurate reporting or relying on unverified information.

# **How the News Is Actually Performing**

# News Media Seen as Only Moderately Effective at Informing the Public

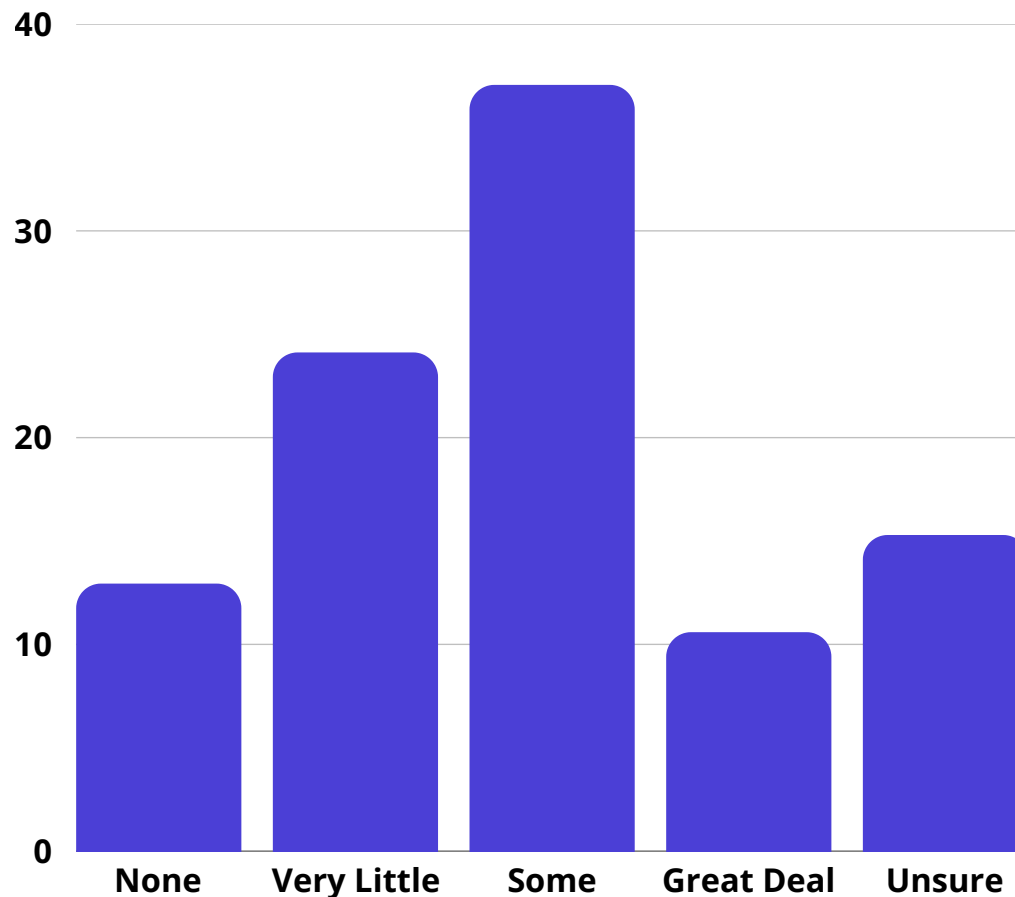
*How well does news media inform you about issues that are important to you?*



While most say news media informs them “somewhat well,” nearly a third say it does not do so well, and relatively few rate its performance as very effective.

# Engagement Is Not Seen as Influencing News Coverage

*How much influence does your engagement with a news story have on future news coverage?*

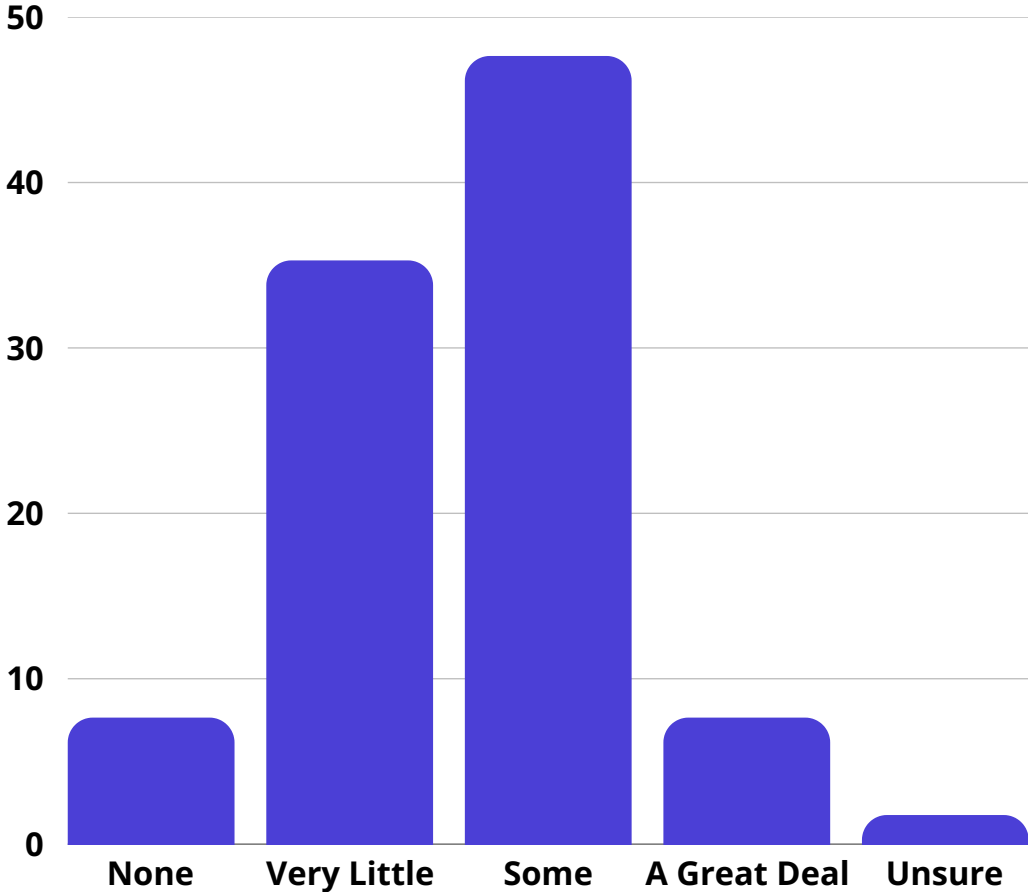


Most respondents say their engagement has only some or very little influence on news coverage, with less than 11 percent believing it has a strong impact.

# **How People Define Trust in News**

# Views on Trust in News Are Clearly Defined

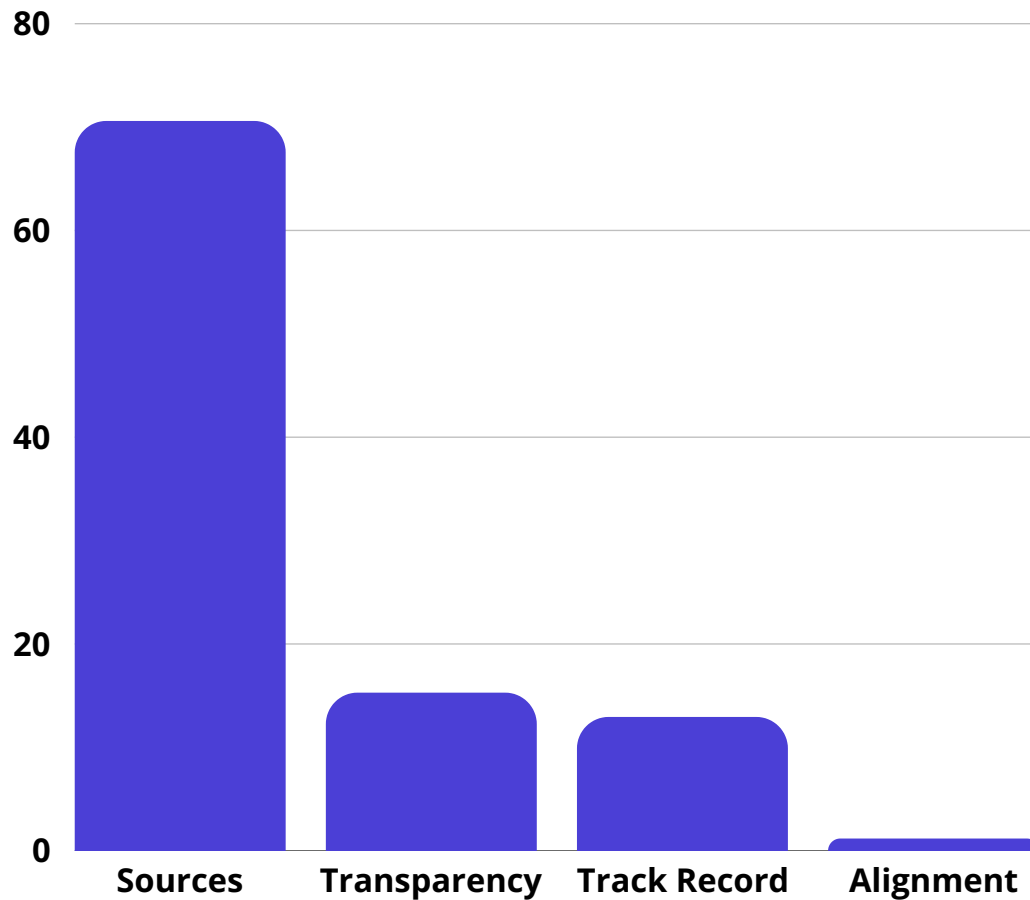
*Overall, how much do you trust the news media today?*



Most respondents report some or very little trust in the news, with fewer than 10% expressing high trust. Very few, or less than 2%, are unsure on this topic.

# Trust Is Driven by Credibility, Not Personal Beliefs

*What determines your trust in a news source?*



Trust is built on credibility—  
quality of sources, transparency,  
and track record of the news outlet  
—not whether coverage aligns with  
personal beliefs.

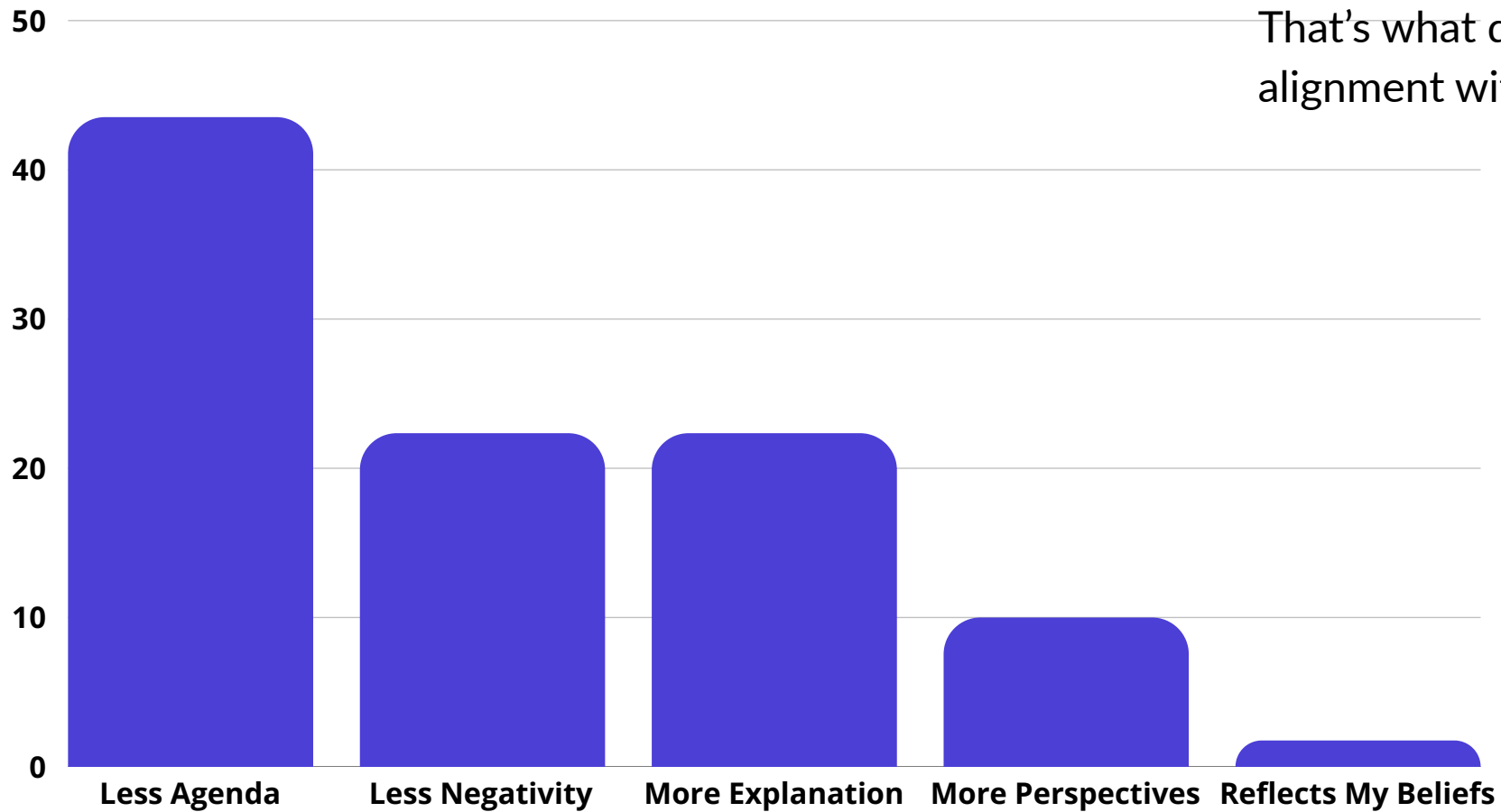
In this context, quality sources are  
credible experts on subject matter.

# **Where News Has Opportunity to Improve**

# Audiences Want Less Agenda and More Substance

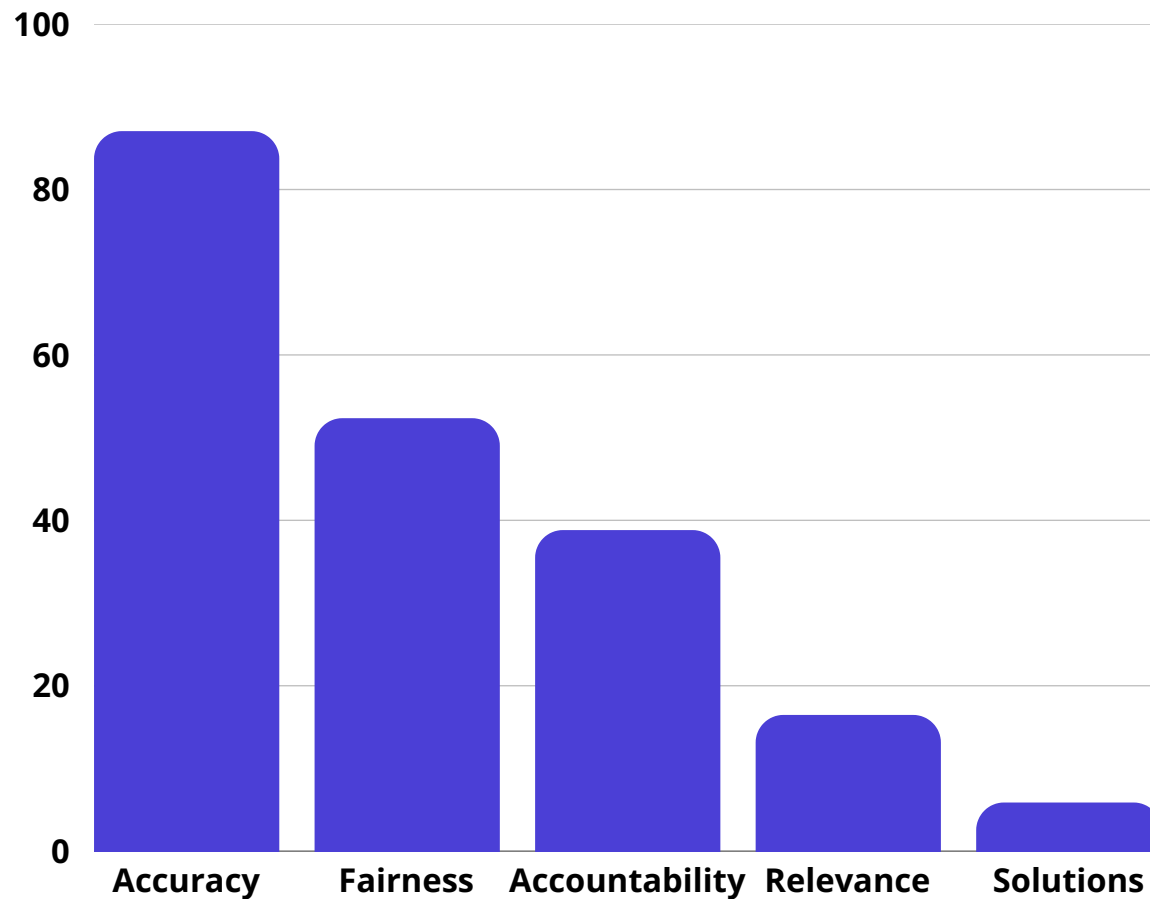
*What would make you more interested in following the news?*

Less agenda. Less negativity.  
More explanation and context.  
That's what drives interest—not  
alignment with personal beliefs.



# What the Public Wants From News

*When choosing where to get your news, what matters most to you?*

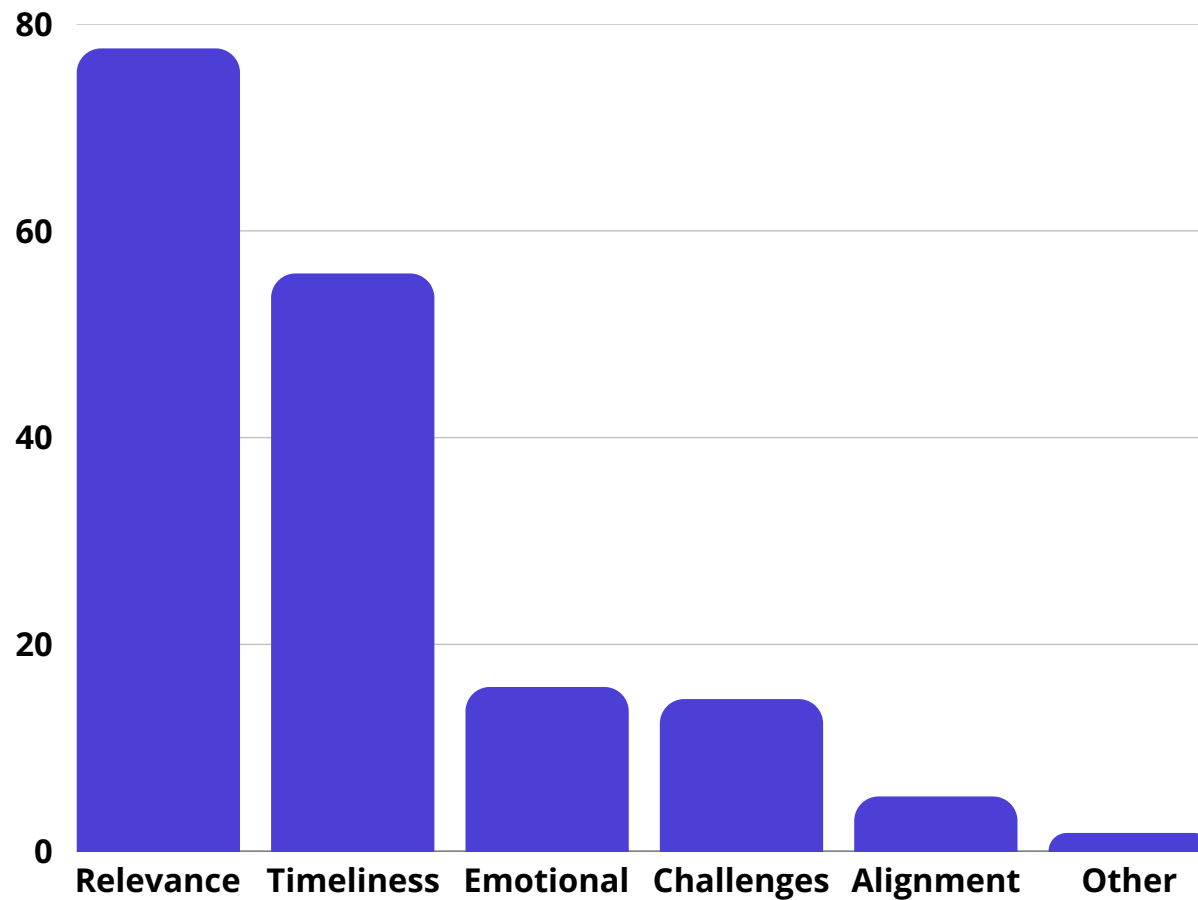


Accuracy stands far above everything else, with nearly 90% of respondents saying it's what they want most from the news. Fairness and accountability follow.

# **What Engagement Means**

# Engagement Does Not Signal Demand

*What makes you engage with a news story?*



Engagement reflects reaction in the moment – not a request for more of the same kind of news.

# Key Takeaway: The Public Sees Critical Gaps

- **Performance Gap:** If media claims to uphold democracy while people see democracy weakening, the public sees the media as falling short of its responsibility.
- **Standards Gap:** Quoting authority over expertise doesn't just weaken accuracy—it erodes trust.
- **Practice Gap:** Engagement doesn't reflect what people want more of.
- **Reputation Gap:** The public doesn't hate the media. They hate being disappointed by it.

# **In Their Own Words**

# What People Want: Core Principles

“No opinions. Truth. Not spin.”

“I don't want to hear a journalist's opinion.”

“Fact-based, accurate, and unbiased.”

# What People Want: Standards in Practice

“Accurate reporting regardless of fear of angering one side”

“...backed up by research and good old investigation”

“...cross checked and confirmed within reason before being presented.”

# What They Think Journalists Do

“Facts over opinion”

“Ask questions no one else is asking”

“Bring people to the story”

“Don’t be the story”

# Who Responded

## Age (by Generation)

- Gen X: 34%
- Baby Boomers: 28%
- Millennials: 22%
- Gen Z: 11%
- Silent: 4%
- Prefer not to say: 2%

## Education

- 50% Graduate/  
professional degree
- 32% Bachelor's
- 12% Some college
- 5% High school or less

## Primary News Source

- 36% Digital news sites
- 31% TV / Streaming
- 19% Social media
- 12% Print
- 2% Radio / Podcasts

*Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding*

# About This Survey

- **Respondents:** General public—not limited to FMC members; no incentives offered.
- **Sample:** 170 respondents
- **Method:** Online and in-person survey
- **Geography:** Primarily Long Island/New York Metro, with responses from across the U.S.
- **Responses:** Some questions allowed multiple selections; totals may exceed 100%.
- **Fielded:** Q4 2025 – Feb. 18, 2026

*Findings reflect directional patterns in public perception of the news media – not an evaluation of specific outlets.*

Platforms have changed.  
Delivery has changed.  
Expectations haven't.

Accuracy.

Fairness.

Credible sources.

Multiple perspectives.

Context.