

US Elections and the Media: Uniquely Weird

Philip Merrill College of Journalism
University of Maryland, College Park

Sarah Oates/soates@umd.edu

www.media-politics.com

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A few useful websites mentioned in the talk as we moved from politics to media ...

- <https://www.270towin.com/> -- tracks electoral college votes and predicts winner
- Curious what a US ballot looks like in different states/areas, you can see local ballots on this website: <https://www.vote411.org/ballot>
- A fun take on a Democratic candidate running in a Republican strong hold, running on the premise she can't win ...
<https://www.katebarrcantwin.com/>

American Journalism

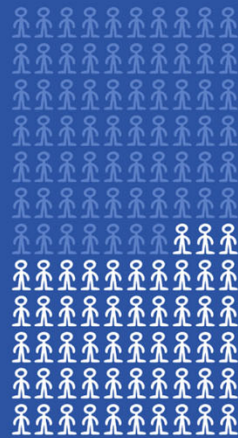
- Freedom of speech protected by Constitution, although states have different laws protecting journalists
- ‘Watchdog’ model, also called the Fourth Estate
- Unique in terms of ownership/economic model
- Part of news system and audience now prefer partisan media to impartial media
- Paid political advertising

The Collapse of Local Reporting

From 2004 to 2020, the number of...

Newspaper
newsroom
employees
dropped

57%



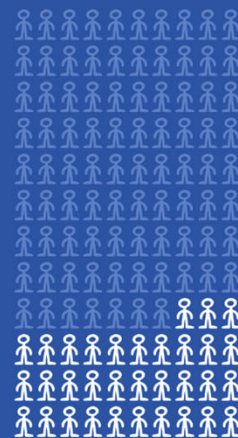
Reporters per
100,000
population
dropped

62%



Reporters per \$100
million in state and
local government
spending dropped

67%

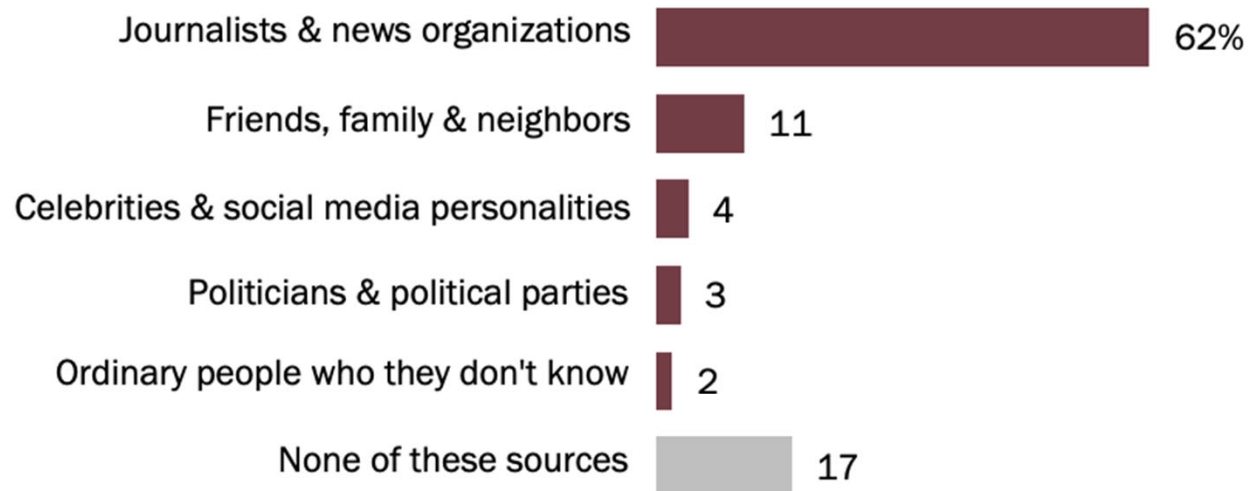


REPORT  AMERICA

Courtesy of Report for America

A majority of Americans get most political and election news from journalists and news organizations

% of U.S. adults who say they get most of their political and election news from ...

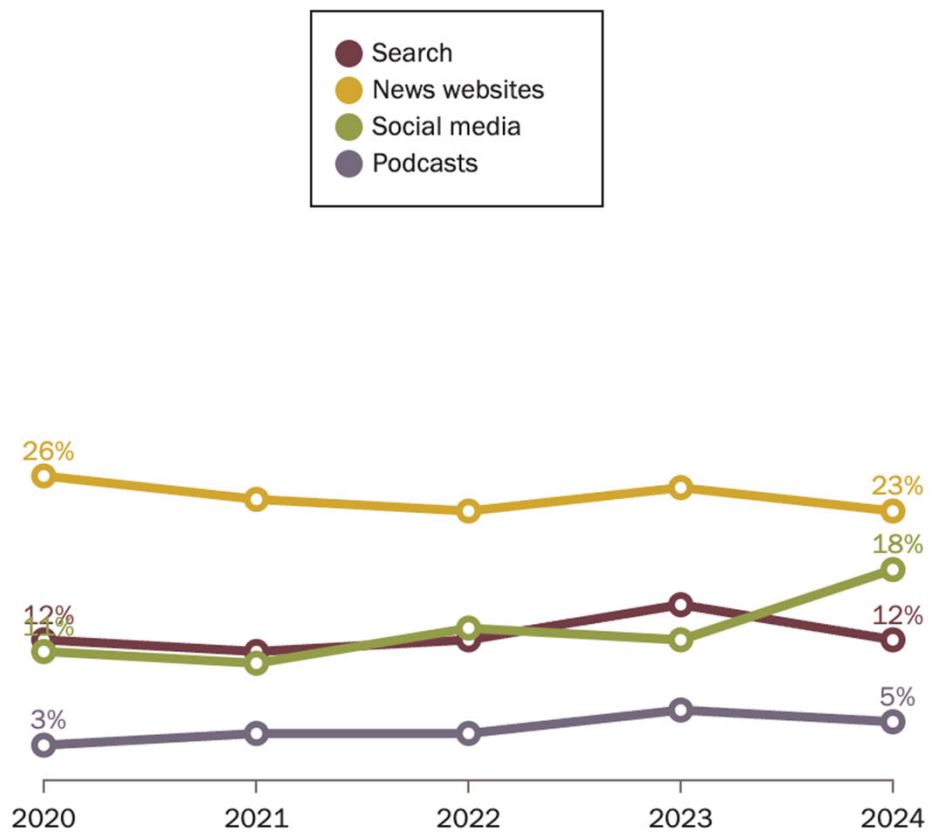


Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 8-14, 2024.

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Digital news platform preferences

% of U.S. adults who prefer ___ for getting news

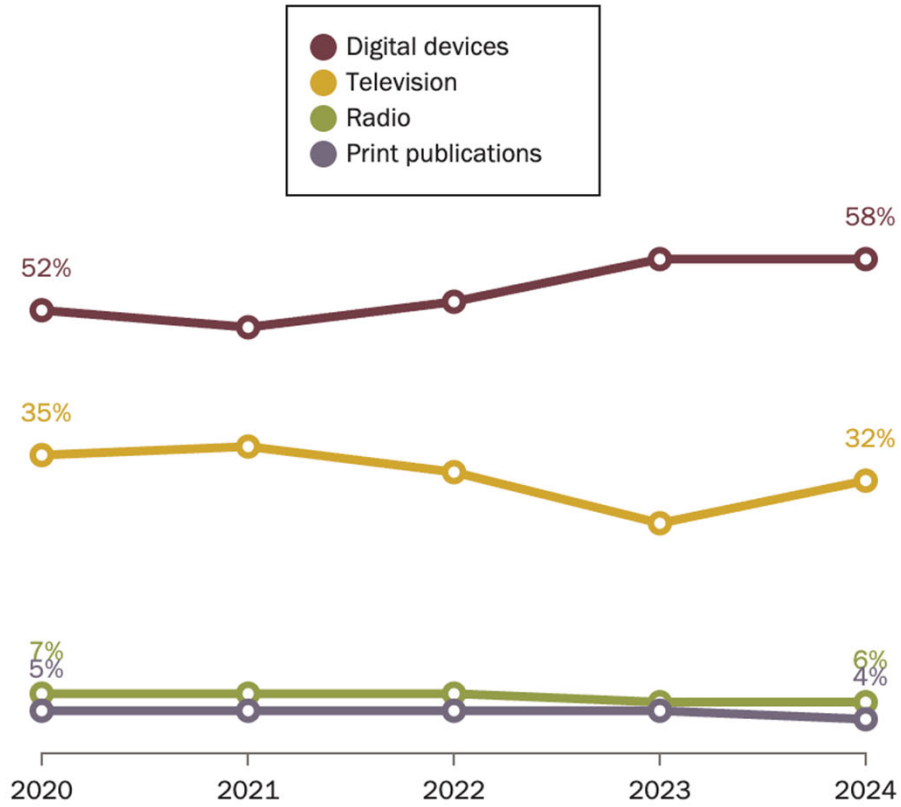


Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 15-Aug. 4, 2024.

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News platform preferences

% of U.S. adults who prefer ____ for getting news



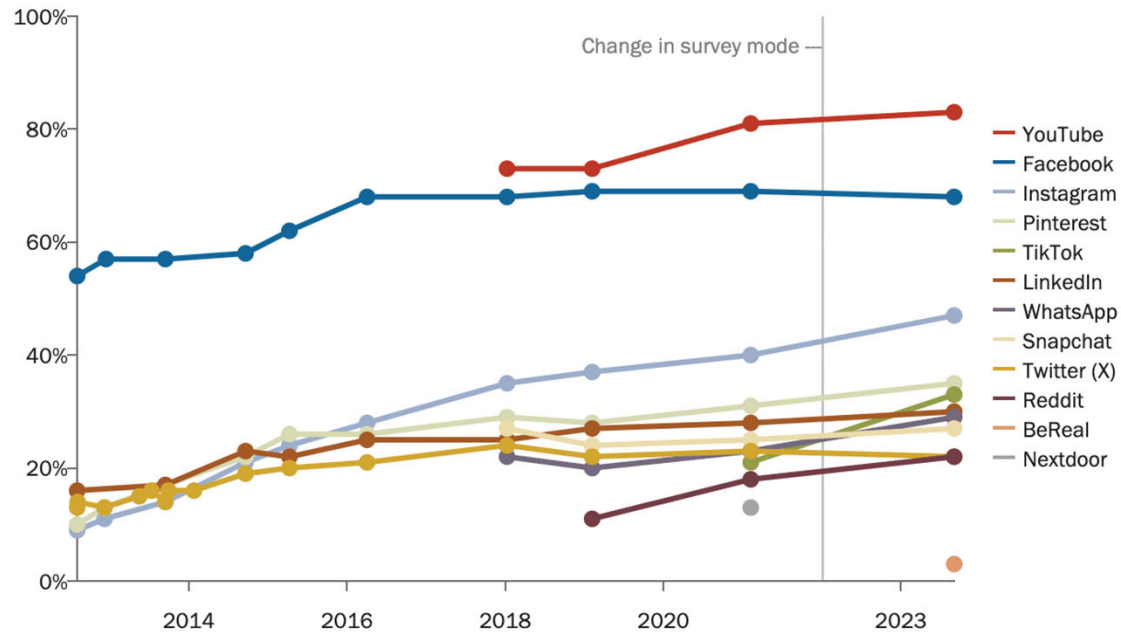
Note: "Digital devices" include smartphones, computers and tablets.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 15-Aug. 4, 2024.

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Which social media platforms are most popular

% of U.S. adults who say they ever use ...



Note: The vertical line indicates a change in mode. Polls from 2012-2021 were conducted via phone. In 2023, the poll was conducted via web and mail. For more details on this shift, please [read our Q&A](#). Refer to the topline for more information on how question wording varied over the years. Pre-2018 data is not available for YouTube, Snapchat or WhatsApp; pre-2019 data is not available for Reddit; pre-2021 data is not available for TikTok; pre-2023 data is not available for BeReal.

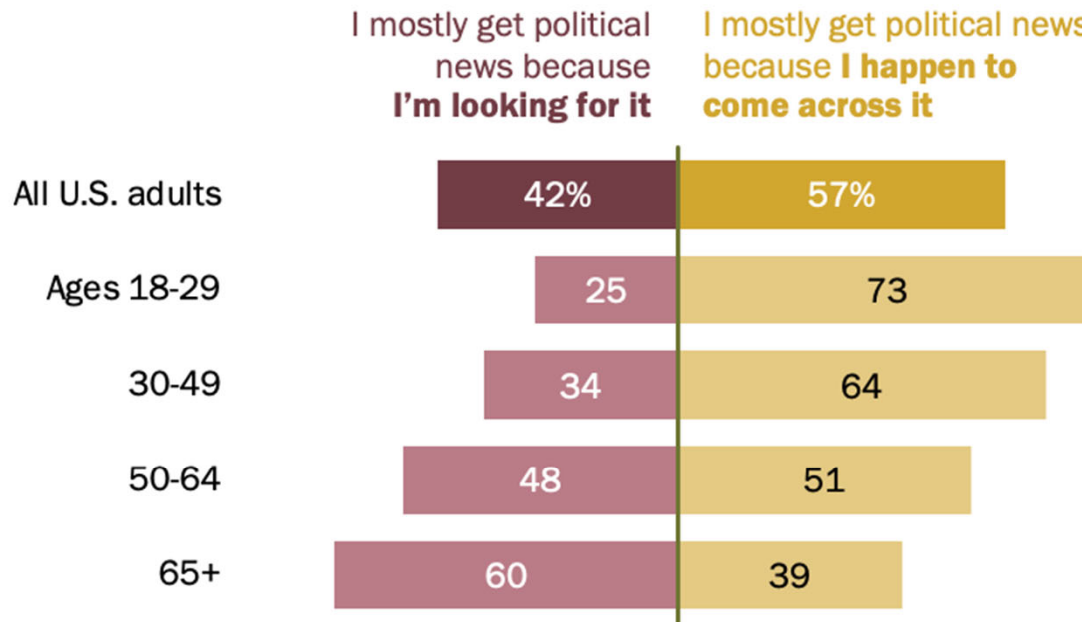
Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted 2012-2023.

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Younger Americans are far less likely than older ones to actively search for political news

% of U.S. adults who say ...



Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 8-14, 2024.

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A majority of Americans are worn out by 2024 presidential campaign coverage ...

% of U.S. adults who say ...

I **like** seeing a lot of coverage of the campaign and candidates

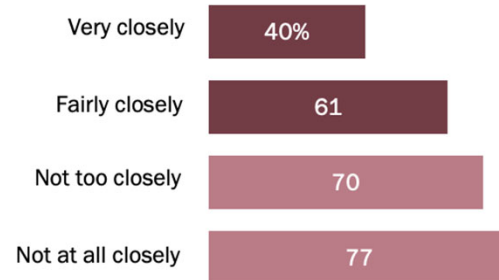
35%

I am **worn out** by so much coverage of the campaign and candidates

62%

... but those closely following election news are less likely to say this

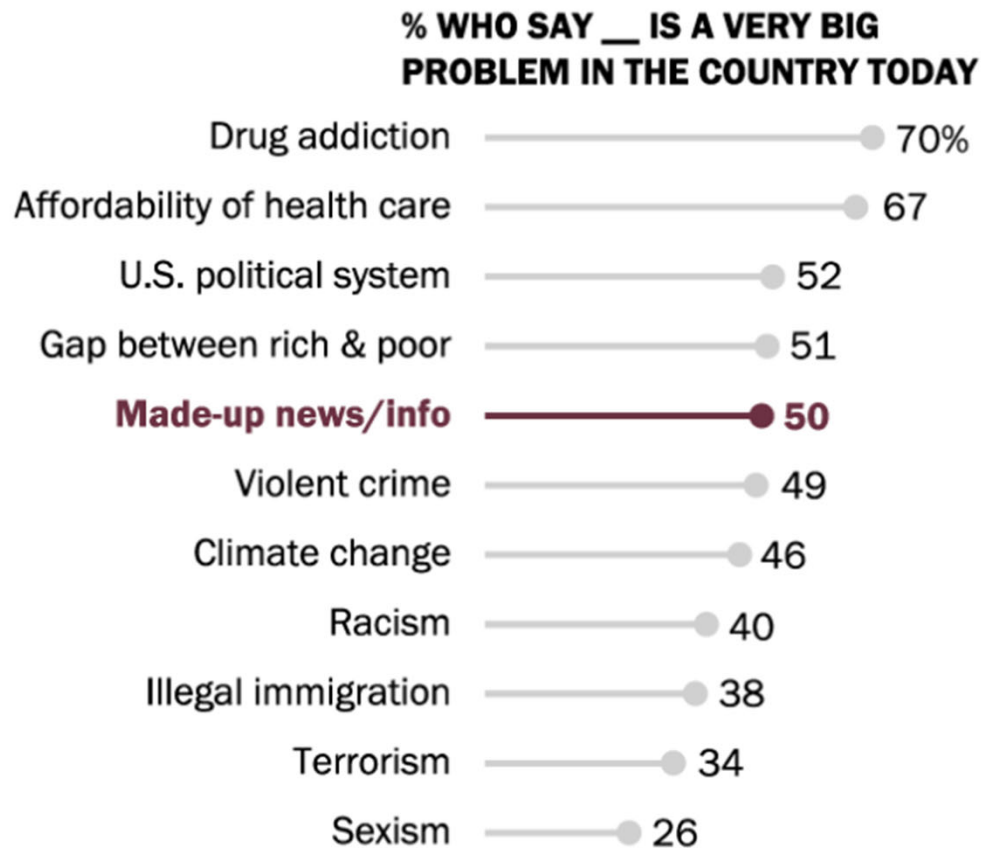
*Among U.S. adults who have been ___ following news about 2024 presidential candidates, % who say they are **worn out** by so much coverage of the campaign and candidates*



Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 8-14, 2024.

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Americans see made-up news as a bigger problem than other key issues ...



**... and most see it as detrimental
to the country's democratic system**

**MADE-UP NEWS AND INFORMATION
HAS A BIG IMPACT ON ...**

68%

Americans' confidence in government

54%

Americans' confidence in each other

51%

Political leaders' ability to get work done

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.

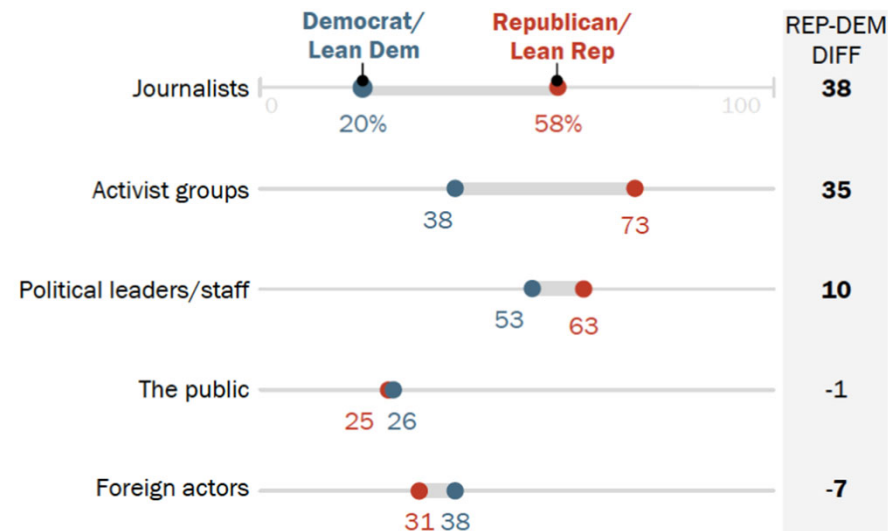
"Many Americans Say Made-Up News Is a Critical Problem That
Needs To Be Fixed"

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But it depends on your political orientation

Republicans about three times as likely as Democrats to blame journalists for creating made-up news and information

% of U.S. adults who say ___ create **a lot** of made-up news and information



Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**.

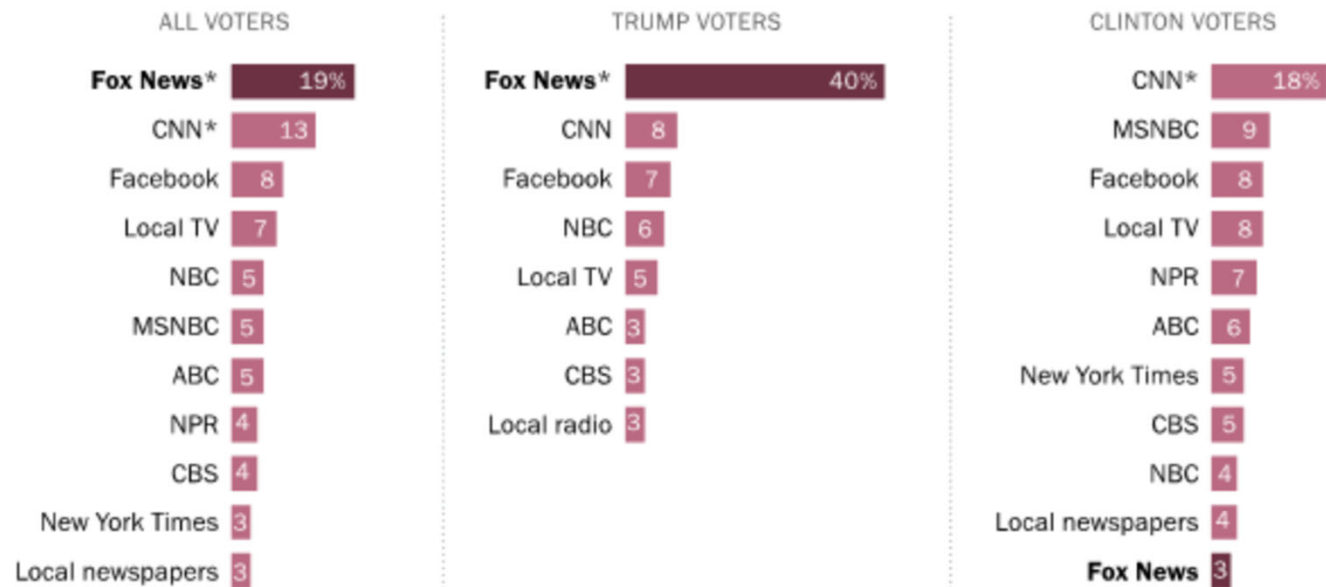
Source: Survey conducted Feb. 19-March 4, 2019.

"Many Americans Say Made-Up News Is a Critical Problem That Needs To Be Fixed"

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Fox News dominated as main campaign news source for Trump voters; no single source as pronounced among Clinton voters

% of voters who named ___ as their "main source" for news about the 2016 campaign



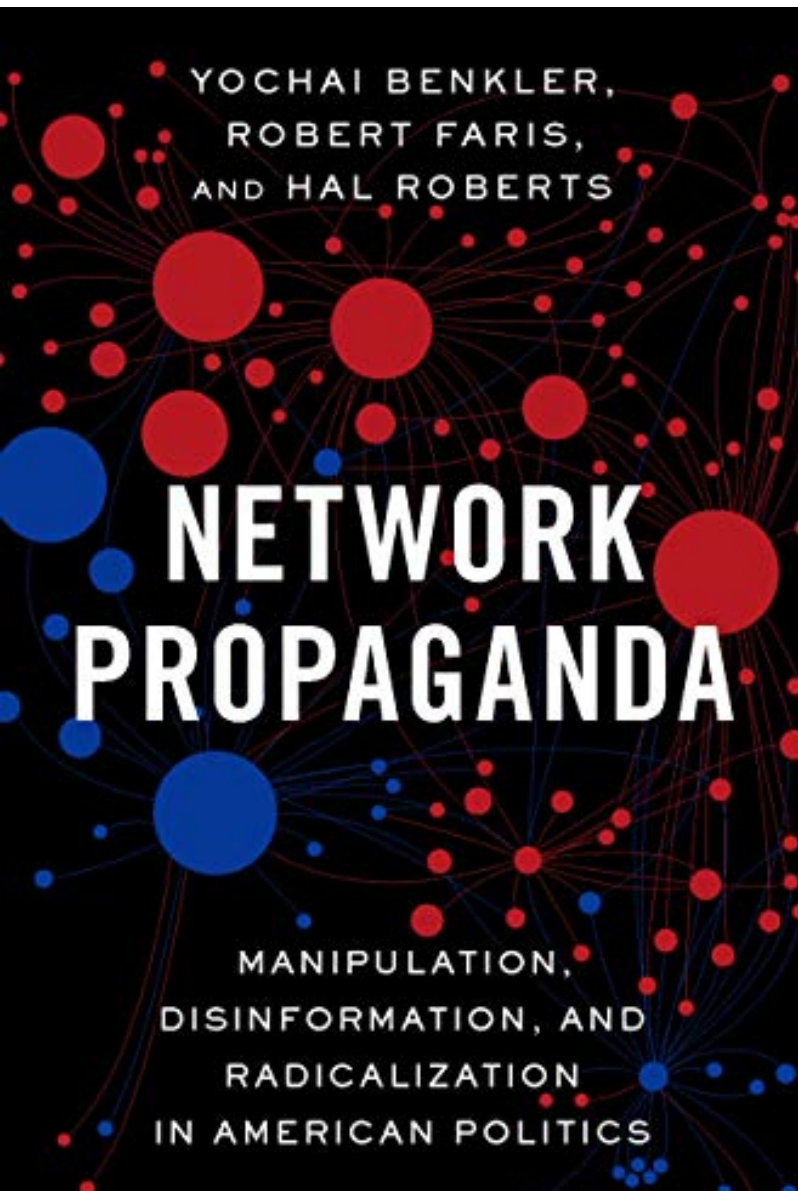
* Among this group of voters, this source was named at significantly higher rates than the source below it. Significance of any other relationships provided upon request.

Note: Sources shown are only those that were named by at least 3% of each group. Results are based on responses to open-ended questions; respondents could write in any source they chose.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016.

"Trump, Clinton Voters Divided in Their Main Source for Election News"

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Not one but two media systems in the US

- Analyzing millions of news stories together with Twitter and Facebook shares, broadcast television and YouTube, the book provides a comprehensive overview of the architecture of contemporary American political communications. Through data analysis and detailed qualitative case studies of coverage of immigration, Clinton scandals, and the Trump Russia investigation, the book finds that the **right-wing media ecosystem** operates fundamentally differently than the rest of the media environment.

The authors argue that longstanding institutional, political, and cultural patterns in American politics have interacted with technological change since the 1970s to create a propaganda feedback loop in American conservative media. This dynamic has marginalized center-right media and politicians, radicalized the right wing ecosystem, and rendered it susceptible to propaganda efforts, foreign and domestic.

Download *Network Propaganda* for free

<http://fdslive.oup.com/www.oup.com/academic/pdf/openaccess/9780190923624.pdf>

How do we move forward?

- Acknowledge that many media outlets, particularly the influential Fox network, do not ascribe to traditional media ethics. Wishing will not make it so.
- Stop waiting for the audience that embraces conspiracy theories to 'wake up' through media literacy
- Cutting off disinformation as close to the source as possible is the most effective strategy
- There needs to be an aggressive strategy to monetize content for news.
- There can be creative solutions through policy or tax to redirect advertising money back into traditional media outlets that provide vital news