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RUN University

Content and Audience Development in the News Space



June 23, 2025



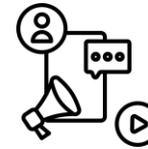
Fundraising

Fundable Ideas and Funding Strategy

Webinar: Monday, June 2
Workshop: Wednesday, June 4



Special Guest:
Margaret Hunt
Hunt Philanthropic



Marketing

Telling Our Story, Reaching People Where They're At

Webinar: Monday, June 9
Workshop: Wednesday, June 11



Special Guest:
Briana O'Higgins
Greater Public



Music

Using Music to Build Community and Uplift Audiences

Webinar: Monday, June 16
Workshop: Wednesday, June 18



Special Guests:
Frank Dominguez, WDAV
Lindsay Kimball, The Current
Tamberly Ferguson, WDAV
Matt Reilly, KUT



News

Content and Audience Development in the News Space

Webinar: Monday, June 23
Workshop: Wednesday, June 25



Special Guests:
Ashley Alvarado, TPR
Megan Garvey, LAist
Rachel Estabrook, CPR
Kevin Dale, CPR
David McGowan, WJCT

Our goals for today

A deep dive in the RUN findings specifically in the news space as they might inform your content and audience development strategies

An effort to marry the data from this research with the experience of your colleagues and the insights arising from other researchers focused on the sector

News-focused audience development themes from the RUN study

The craving for more local storytelling

Filling a vacuum left by the contraction of local news sources

The appetite for in-depth journalism

Coverage that's valued, hard to find, and seen as necessary

Closing the trust gap

The need and potential to be a reliable and trustworthy source

Looking for hope

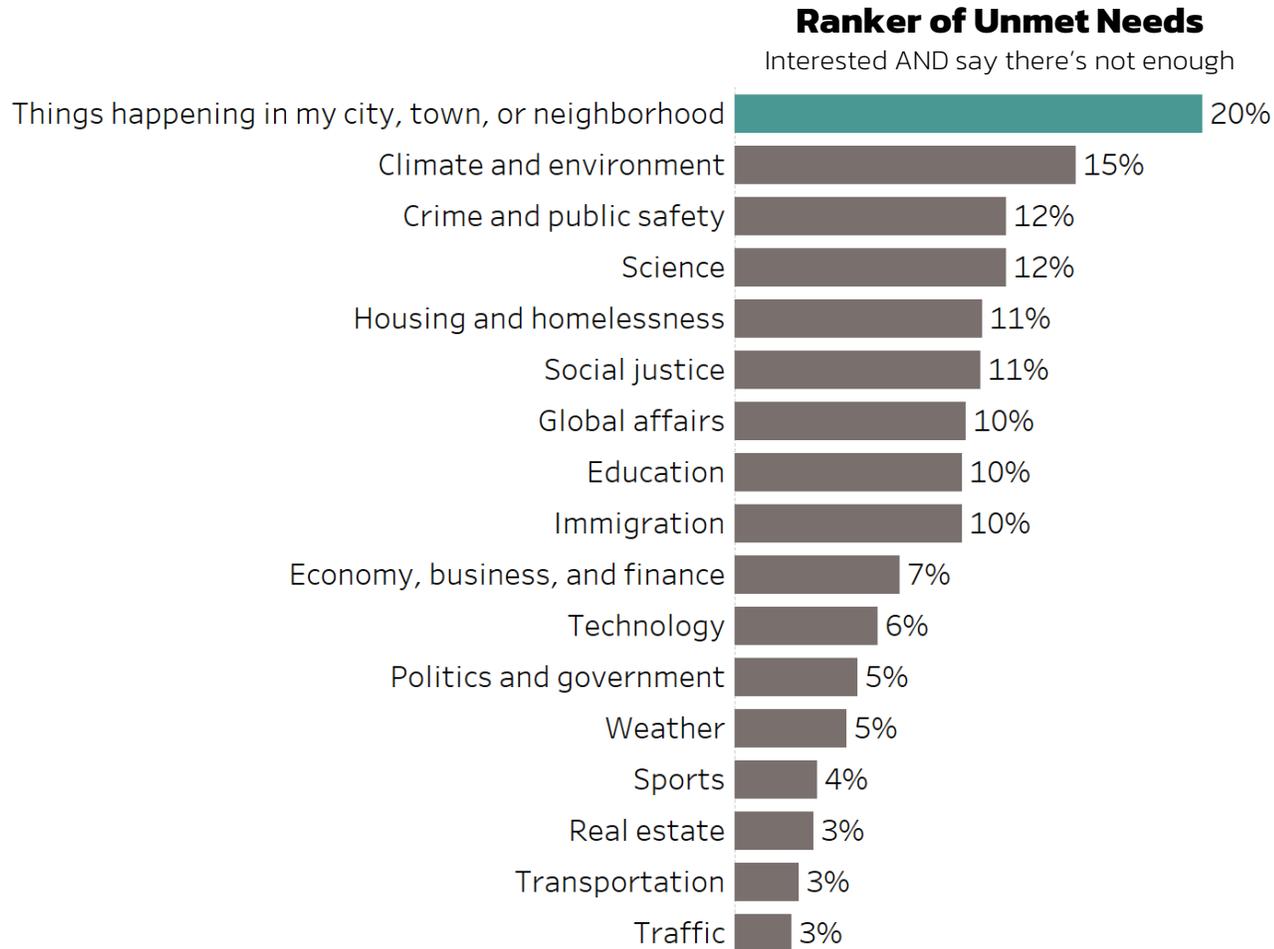
The value of tonal balance in a stressful and polarized news-scape

The craving for more local storytelling





Typically, local storytelling emerges as the most pressing unmet need



Interest in and appetite for more coverage of **things happening in my area was especially high among:**

- Those who are highly civically engaged (28%)
- Gen-Xers (24%) and Baby Boomers (25%)
- Rural residents (24%)
- Women (23%)
- Residents who moved from out of state (23%)



Local storytelling bridges the political divide

	Ranker of Unmet Needs Interested AND say there's not enough	Very or somewhat conservative	Moderate	Very or somewhat liberal
Things happening in my city, town, or neighborhood	20%	20%	20%	21%
Climate and environment	15%	6%	14%	26%
Crime and public safety	12%	13%	12%	10%
Science	12%	9%	10%	17%
Housing and homelessness	11%	7%	11%	14%
Social justice	11%	4%	9%	20%
Global affairs	10%	8%	9%	13%
Education	10%	8%	10%	13%
Immigration	10%	16%	8%	6%
Economy, business, and finance	7%	8%	8%	5%
Technology	6%	6%	6%	7%
Politics and government	5%	6%	4%	6%
Weather	5%	5%	6%	4%
Sports	4%	4%	4%	3%
Real estate	3%	4%	3%	3%
Transportation	3%	3%	3%	3%
Traffic	3%	3%	2%	2%



Local storytelling resonates across the country

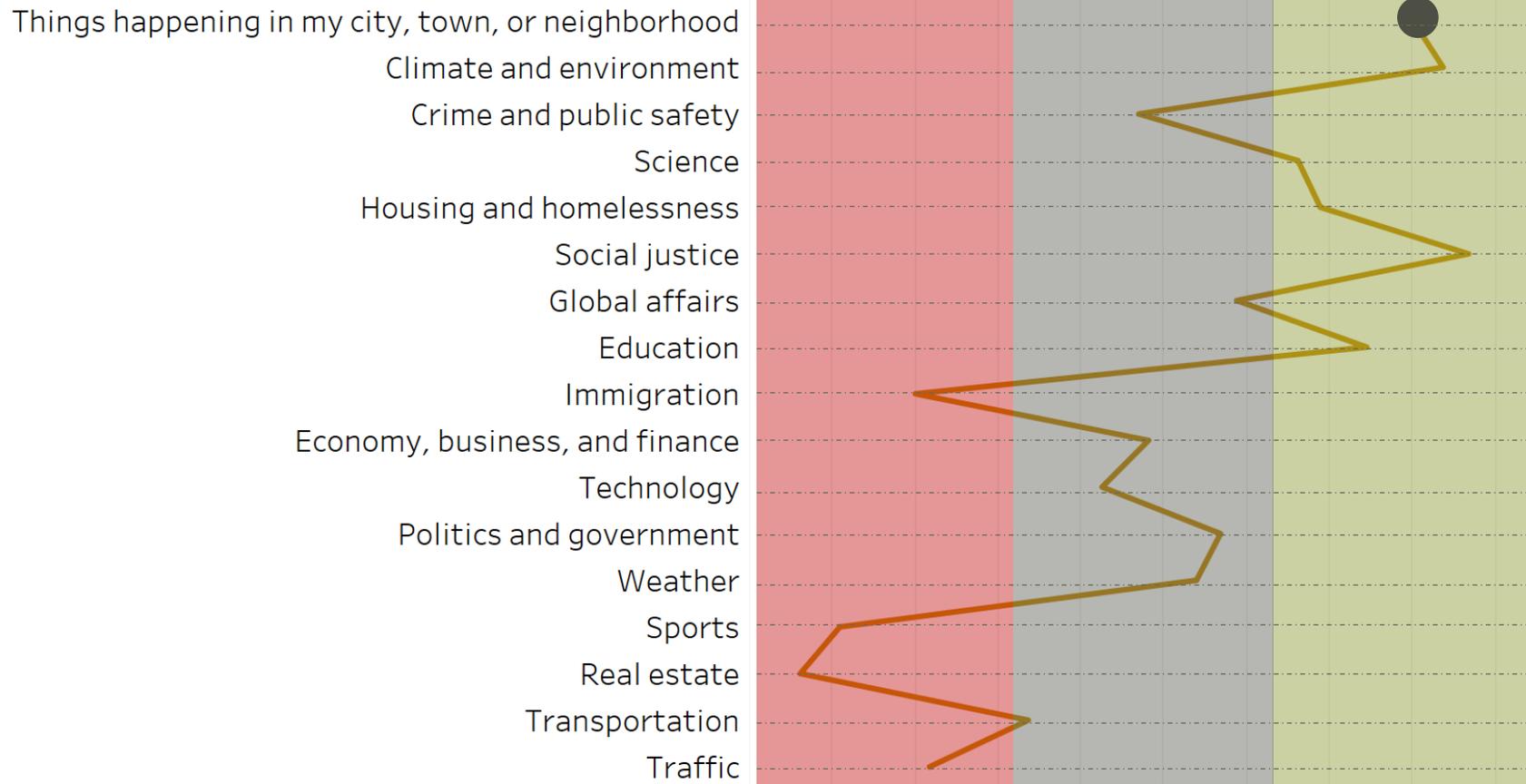
Ranker of Unmet Needs % interested AND say there's not enough	National	Atlanta	Charlotte	Cleveland	Colorado	Jacksonville	Michigan	Milwaukee	Wisconsin	Minnesota	Nebraska	New York City	OKC and Tulsa	Philadelphia	Pittsburgh	Central Virginia	St. Louis	Tampa Bay	Utah	Washington DC
	Things happening in my city/town/neighborhood	20%	19%	20%	24%	23%	18%	21%	23%	25%	22%	19%	19%	22%	19%	23%	21%	20%	18%	22%
Climate and environment	15%	15%	13%	15%	15%	13%	15%	12%	16%	14%	14%	14%	12%	14%	14%	15%	12%	13%	11%	15%
Crime and public safety	12%	11%	10%	13%	17%	11%	11%	9%	12%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	11%	13%	11%	10%	10%	12%
Science	12%	9%	10%	12%	14%	9%	11%	10%	12%	13%	13%	10%	12%	10%	11%	10%	12%	10%	14%	11%
Housing and homelessness	11%	11%	10%	10%	10%	13%	10%	8%	9%	9%	10%	9%	10%	10%	8%	12%	9%	10%	10%	8%
Social justice	11%	11%	9%	12%	11%	11%	12%	9%	9%	11%	8%	9%	10%	10%	11%	13%	10%	9%	8%	11%
Global affairs	10%	11%	8%	10%	11%	9%	10%	11%	9%	8%	8%	10%	10%	9%	10%	10%	9%	10%	12%	12%
Education	10%	9%	10%	11%	12%	10%	8%	8%	10%	10%	12%	11%	14%	10%	9%	13%	11%	9%	12%	10%
Immigration	10%	10%	12%	9%	12%	13%	9%	12%	10%	9%	11%	9%	12%	9%	11%	9%	10%	11%	11%	9%
Economy, business, and finance	7%	9%	7%	8%	7%	10%	7%	6%	5%	7%	4%	9%	6%	5%	6%	8%	7%	9%	7%	9%
Technology	6%	6%	5%	5%	5%	6%	5%	5%	6%	5%	6%	6%	5%	6%	5%	8%	5%	6%	7%	6%
Politics and government	5%	5%	2%	4%	6%	5%	5%	5%	4%	4%	3%	6%	4%	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%	4%	6%
Weather	5%	4%	6%	5%	5%	5%	5%	3%	2%	2%	5%	5%	6%	5%	3%	5%	6%	4%	4%	5%
Sports	4%	3%	3%	4%	3%	4%	3%	3%	2%	3%	5%	2%	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%
Real estate	3%	4%	2%	4%	3%	4%	3%	4%	4%	2%	3%	4%	2%	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%	5%	4%
Transportation	3%	2%	2%	2%	3%	4%	3%	2%	2%	2%	3%	5%	2%	3%	2%	2%	3%	2%	1%	5%
Traffic	3%	2%	1%	3%	4%	4%	2%	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%	3%	3%	4%



Local storytelling is already considered a public radio strength

Public Radio as a Go-To

Interested, not enough, AND public radio would be good at providing



Note: options only presented if selected as interested AND say there's not enough. Data filtered to include all respondents from the National sample and all local market general population samples identified as having "most" or "some" knowledge of public radio (n=7,456), based on open-text classification of responses to open-text question "What comes to mind when you hear 'public radio'".



In Utah, members of the community at large value local more so than station members



	General public					KUER constituents				
	Rank of interest					Rank of interest				
	Most	#2	#3	#4	Least	Most	#2	#3	#4	Least
News about your town or city	39%	19%	14%	14%	14%	18%	18%	21%	20%	23%
National news	25%	15%	19%	32%	8%	50%	20%	11%	15%	4%
News from across the state of Utah	18%	42%	19%	15%	6%	14%	24%	25%	25%	12%
International news	11%	15%	13%	16%	46%	12%	27%	15%	17%	29%
News from around the region (the West)	7%	10%	35%	22%	26%	6%	11%	28%	23%	32%

Question text: How would you rank your interest in news about each of the following? Rank the following by sorting them in order of news stories you're MOST interested in (at the top) to news stories you're LEAST interested in (at the bottom).



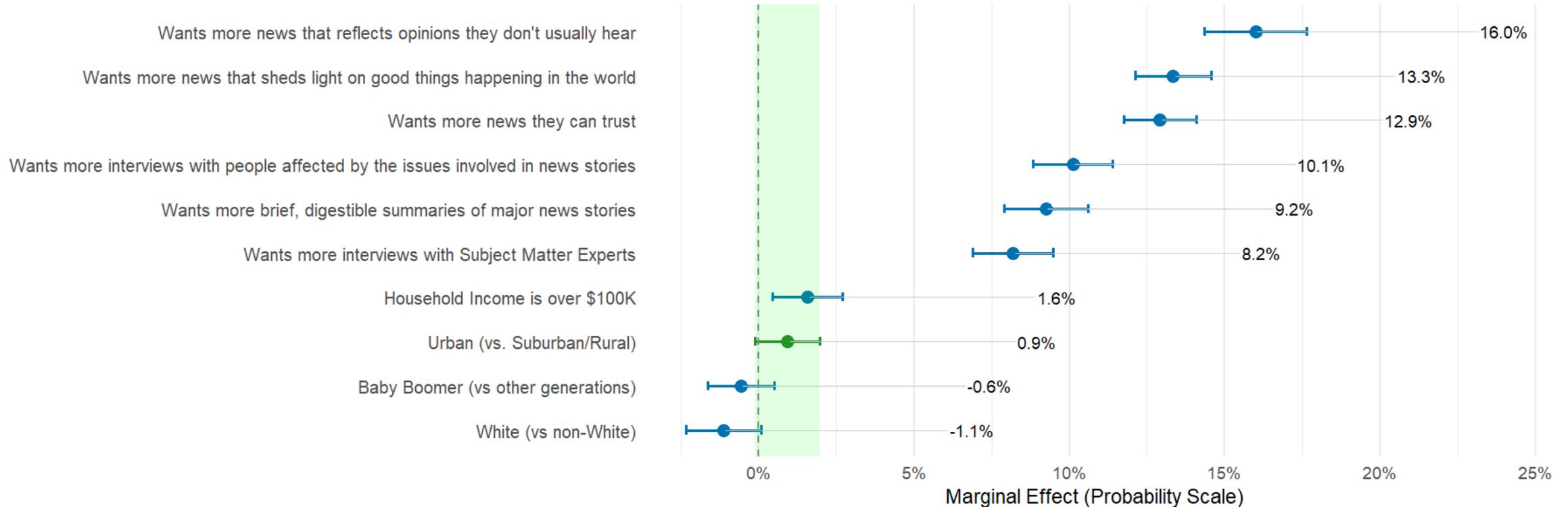
Regression analysis

A local lens for national headlines closely aligned with other unmet needs

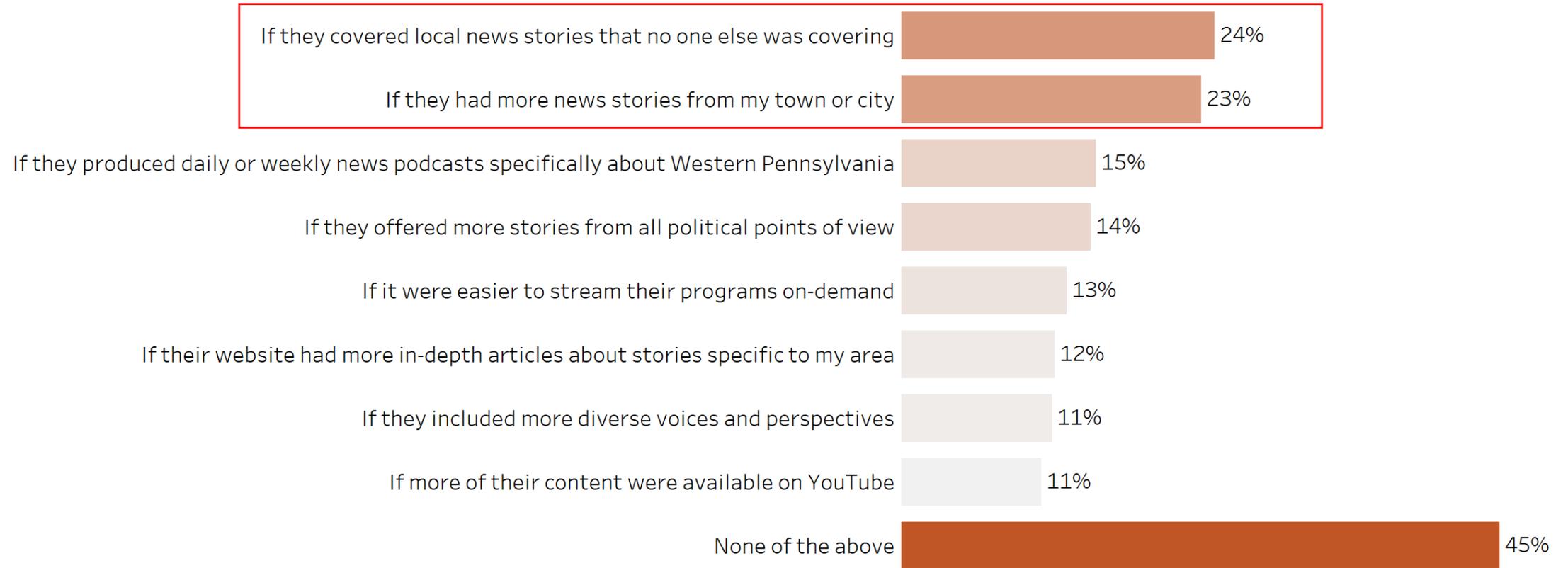
“It provides local context to national issues”

26%

Important and say there's not enough



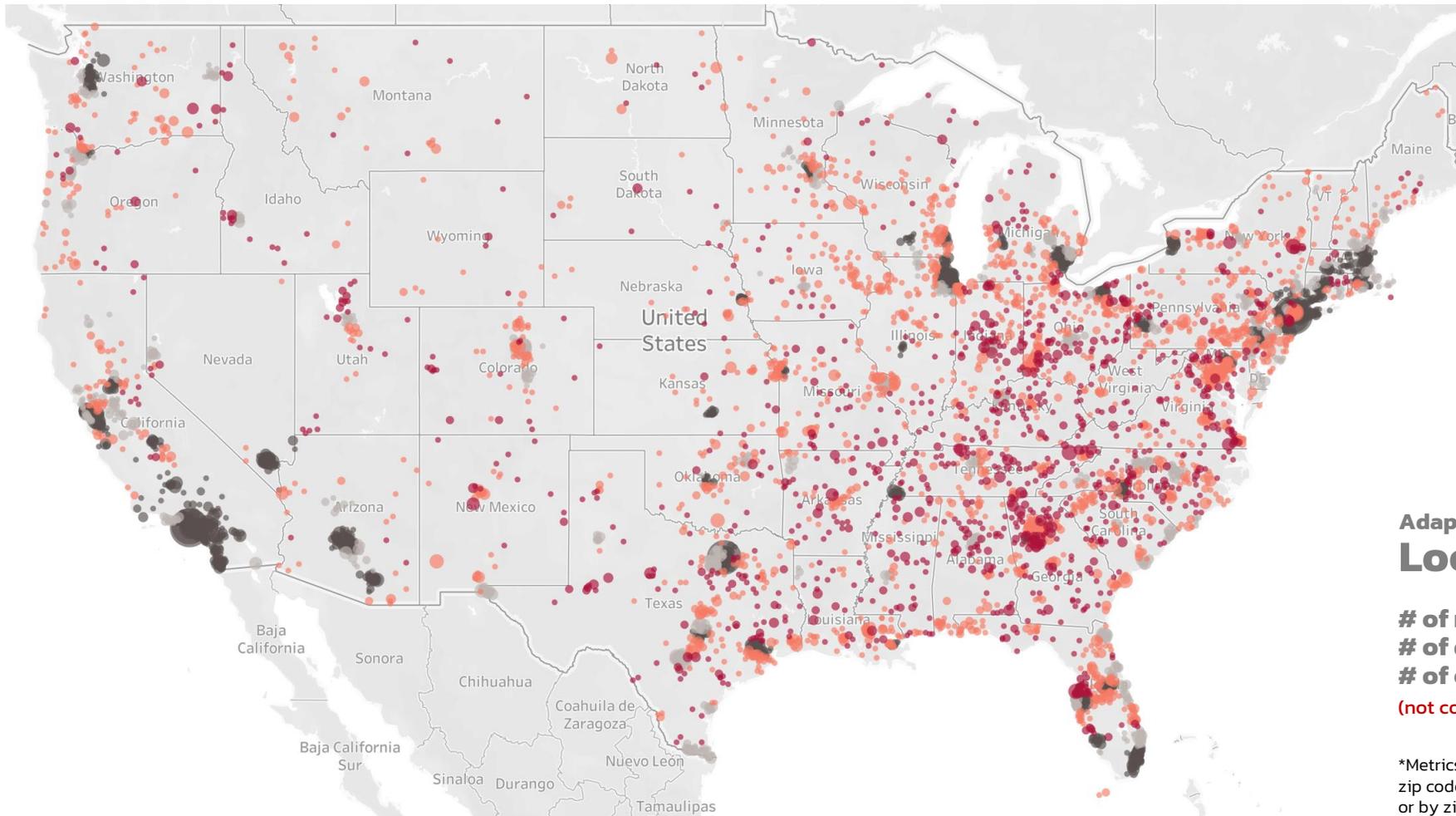
In Pittsburgh, more *unique* local stories about *my own town or city* are the top drivers of intent-to-use



Question text: And which of the following would make you more likely to want to use WESA as a source for news and information? Select all that apply.



A significant proportion of the population live in places with no or few local media options beyond public media



Local Media Count

- 0 to 1
- 2 to 5
- 6 to 10
- 11 or more

Adapted from Medill's Local News Initiative

Local Media Count =

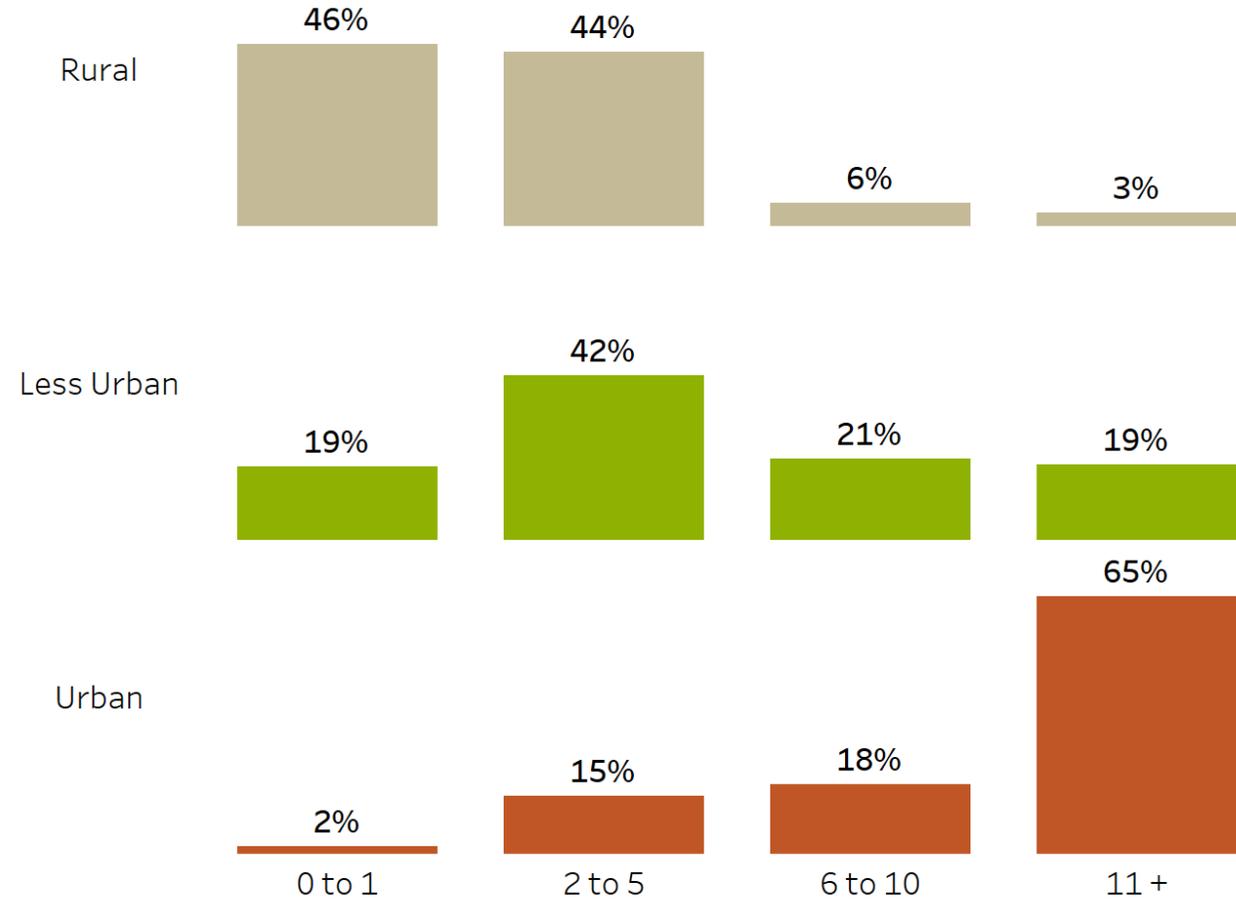
of newspapers in a county +
of digital-only news sites in a county +
of ethnic media organizations
(not counting public media)

*Metrics connected to RUN respondent-level data either by zip code county conversions (Local News Initiative dataset) or by zip code ZCTA conversions (Census).



This correlates strongly, but not exclusively, with population density

*Metrics connected to RUN respondent-level data either by zip code county conversions (Local News Initiative dataset) or by zip code ZCTA conversions (Census).



The need for local coverage is strongest in areas with the fewest options

	Ranker of Unmet Needs	Local Media Count			
	Interested AND say there's not enough	0-1	2-5	6-10	11+
Things happening in my city, town, or neighborhood	20%	24%	22%	20%	19%
Climate and environment	15%	14%	14%	16%	16%
Crime and public safety	12%	13%	11%	12%	12%
Science	12%	11%	11%	13%	12%
Housing and homelessness	11%	10%	10%	12%	11%
Social justice	11%	9%	10%	12%	12%
Global affairs	10%	9%	9%	10%	11%
Education	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Immigration	10%	10%	9%	10%	10%
Economy, business, and finance	7%	7%	7%	7%	8%
Technology	6%	6%	6%	7%	7%
Politics and government	5%	5%	5%	5%	6%
Weather	5%	5%	5%	6%	4%
Sports	4%	3%	3%	4%	4%
Real estate	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%
Transportation	3%	2%	3%	3%	3%
Traffic	3%	2%	3%	3%	2%



Insights beyond RUN

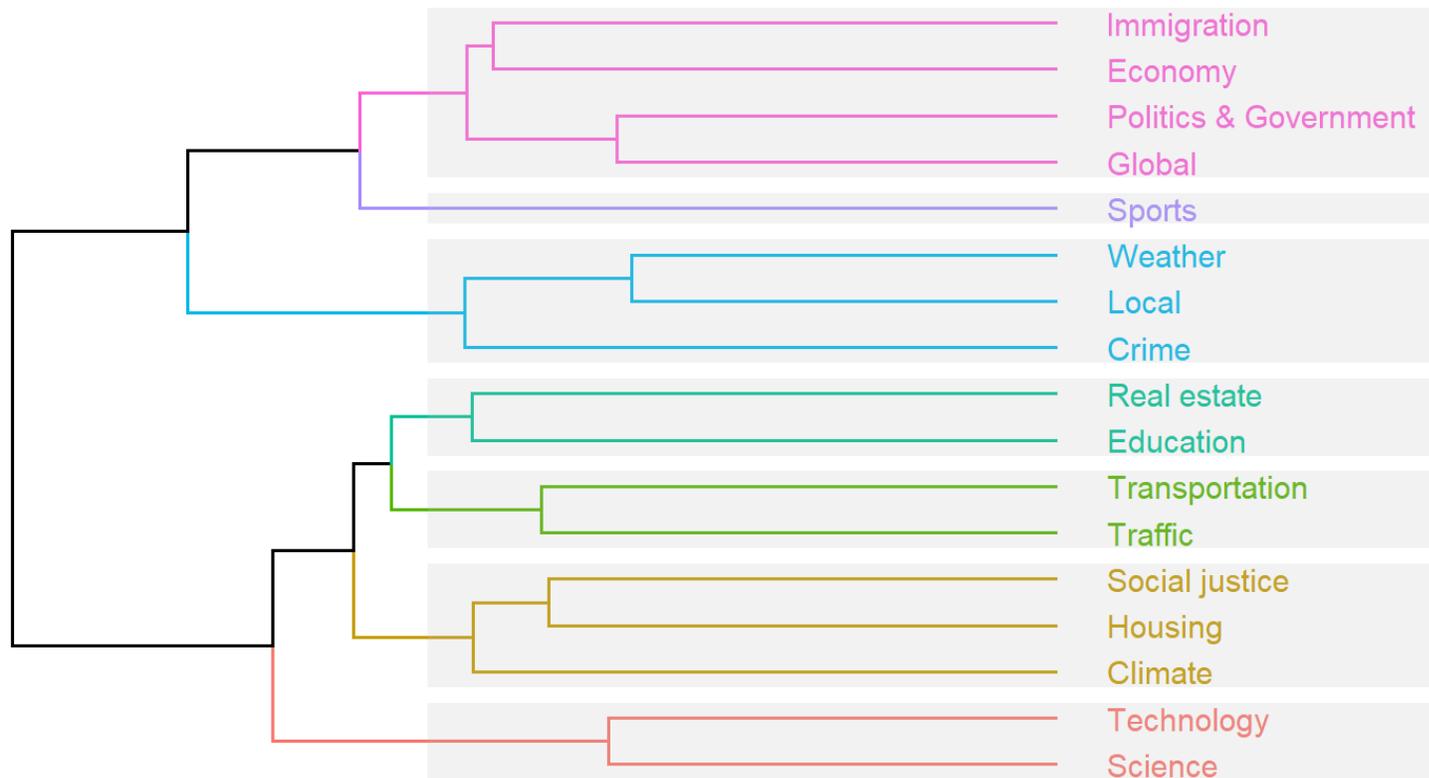
News Crisis: Can Local Public Radio Help Fill the News Gap Created by the Decline of Local Newspapers?

January 2023

“Most local public radio stations serve communities where the quality and quantity of local news and public affairs information is inadequate to their information needs.”

“In terms of news coverage and audience reach, most local stations are positioned to be a leading news source for their community, a positioning that would be strengthened if they were to receive substantial new funding.”

Understanding of topical affinities can help inform editorial priorities



Five clusters emerged from a hierarchical cluster analysis of the news topic interest data, representing natural affinities among specific topical areas.

People who seek out one of these topic in a specific cluster are also likely to find other clustered topics equally interesting

How to Read: On average, people interested in **Climate** are also *very likely* to seek out stories about **Social Justice** and **Housing**. People who seek out **Politics** are *more likely* to seek out **Immigration** than **Science**.

Vertical lines show where two genres (or clusters of genres) are grouped based on similarity in listener preference. Genres joined further to the right > are more likely to be enjoyed together, while those grouped further to the < left are less commonly preferred together.



The appetite for in-depth journalism



The need for in-depth storytelling far exceeds that of all other tested formats

Ranker of Unmet Needs

Interested* AND say "I wish there was more of this"



*Defined as having provided a rating of 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale, where 1 is "not at all" drawn to this format, and 7 is "very much so."



Public radio already well positioned to deliver on this too

Public Radio as a Go-To

Interested, wish there was more, AND public radio would be good at providing



Note: options only presented if selected as interested AND say there's not enough. Data filtered to include all respondents from the National sample and all local market general population samples identified as having "most" or "some" knowledge of public radio (n=7,456), based on open-text classification of responses to open-text question "What comes to mind when you hear 'public radio'".



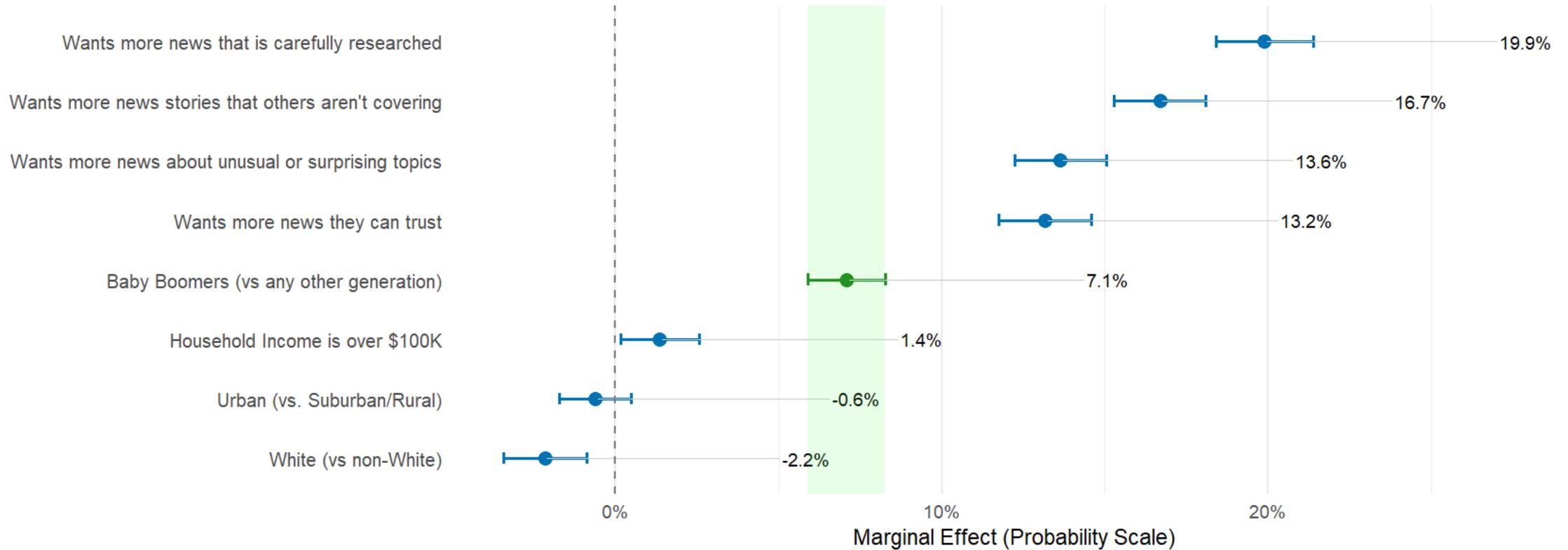
Regression analysis

In-depth investigative format also predicts interest in untold stories

“In depth stories brought to light through investigative reporting

35%

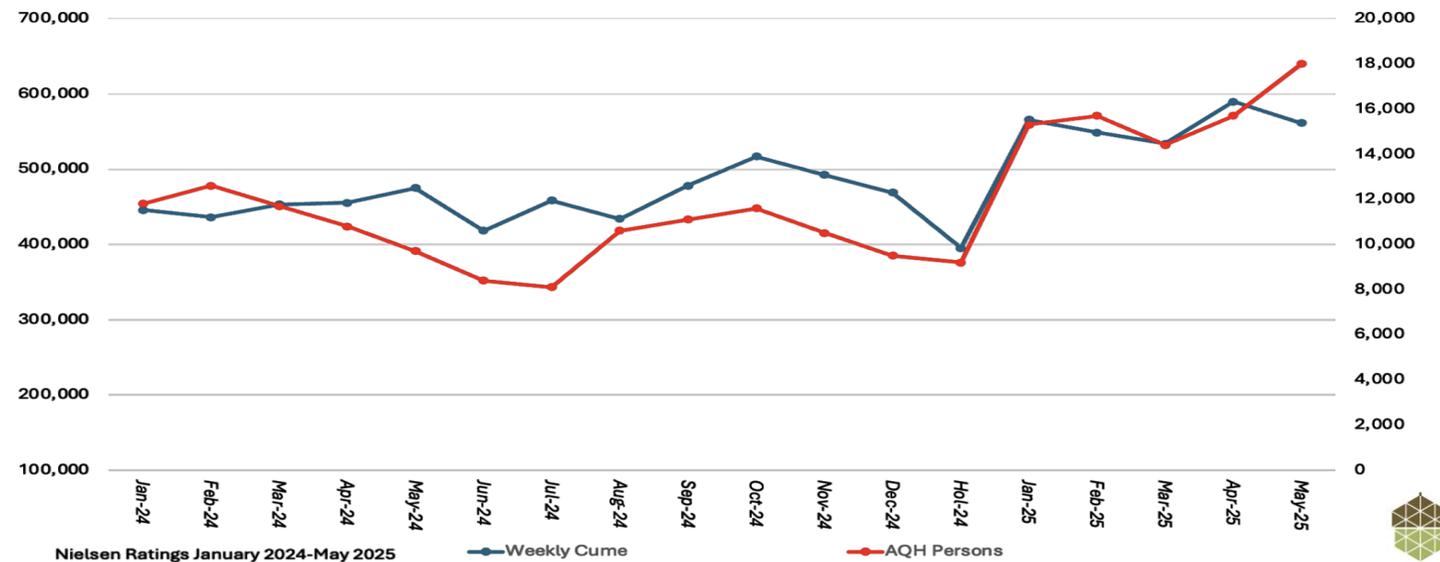
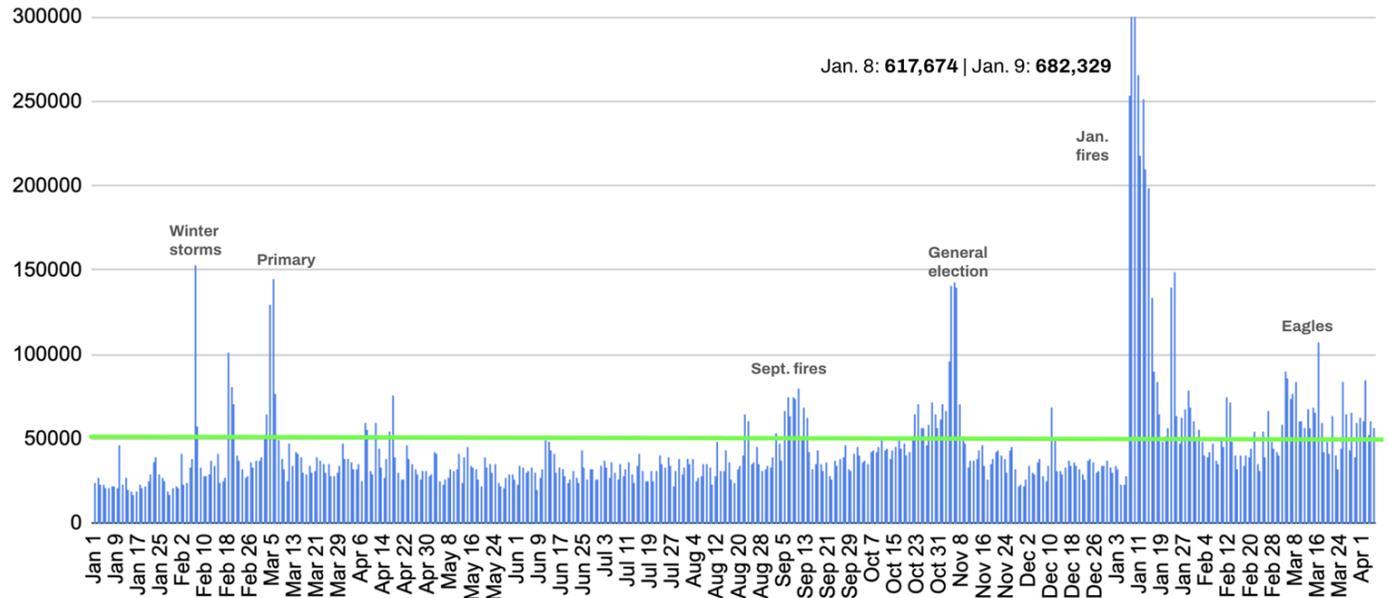
Interested and wish there was more





3 interconnected coverage streams:

- ✓ Daily news
 - ✓ Watchdog journalism
 - ✓ Explore LA
- + Strategic partner content



People value local journalism ... though not equally

“ Supporting local journalism is an important way to help preserve democracy.

55%

Agree or strongly agree

32%

Neutral

12%

Disagree or strongly disagree

Segments that were even more likely to agree or strongly agree:

- People who identify as **somewhat liberal** (68%) or **very liberal** (75%)
- People with **graduate degrees** (71%)
- **Affluent households*** (66%)
- **Men** (60%)
- **Millennials** (58%) and **Baby Boomers** (58%)
- **Urban residents** (58%)

Question text: Here are some statements about news and music. Using the scale below, please rate your level of agreement with each of them.

*Households with annual income over \$200,000



Insights beyond RUN

“Funding Democracy: Public Media and Democratic Health in 33 Countries”

We find five models of public media systems around the world, ranging from “state-administered” systems with low levels of independence ... to systems ... with strong and secure (multiyear) funding, large audience shares, and strong regulatory protection for their independence.

Correlations and cluster analyses show that high levels of secure funding for public media systems and strong structural protections for the political and economic independence of those systems are consistently and positively correlated with healthy democracies.

Closing the trust gap



Distrust in the news media ecosystem is pervasive

“ I’m concerned about the accuracy and reliability of news I come across these days.

75%

Agree or strongly agree

16%

Neutral

9%

Disagree or strongly disagree

Segments from the general public that were even more likely to agree or strongly agree:

- **Baby Boomers** (80%)
- **College-educated** (80%)
- People who are **somewhat liberal** (78%) or **somewhat conservative** (78%)



Trustworthy news that's well-researched is in short supply

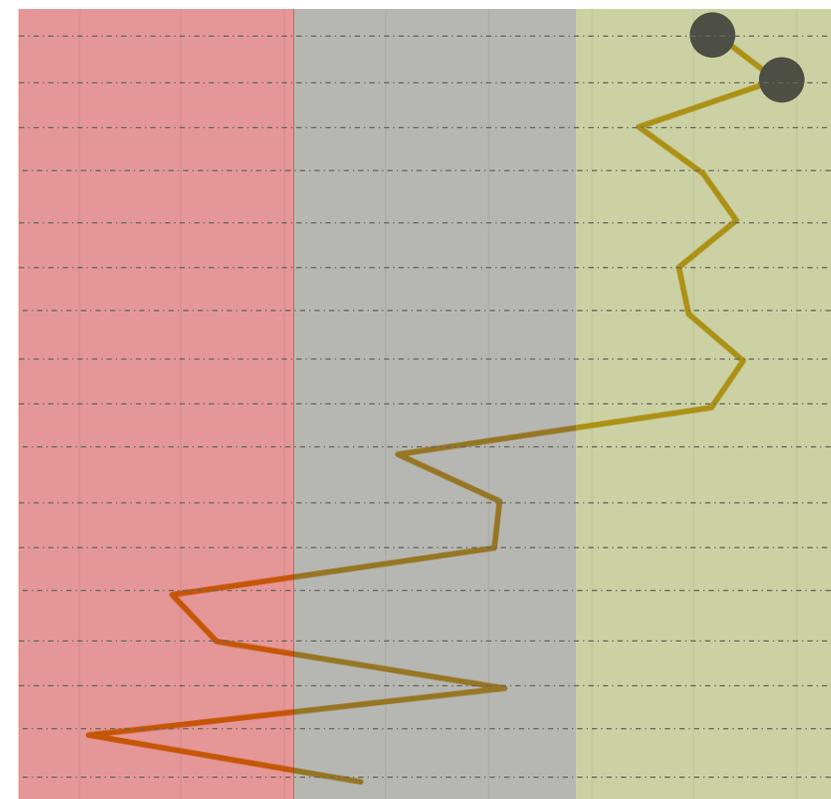
Ranker of Unmet Needs

Important AND say there's not enough



Public Radio as a Go-To

Important, not enough, AND public radio good at providing*



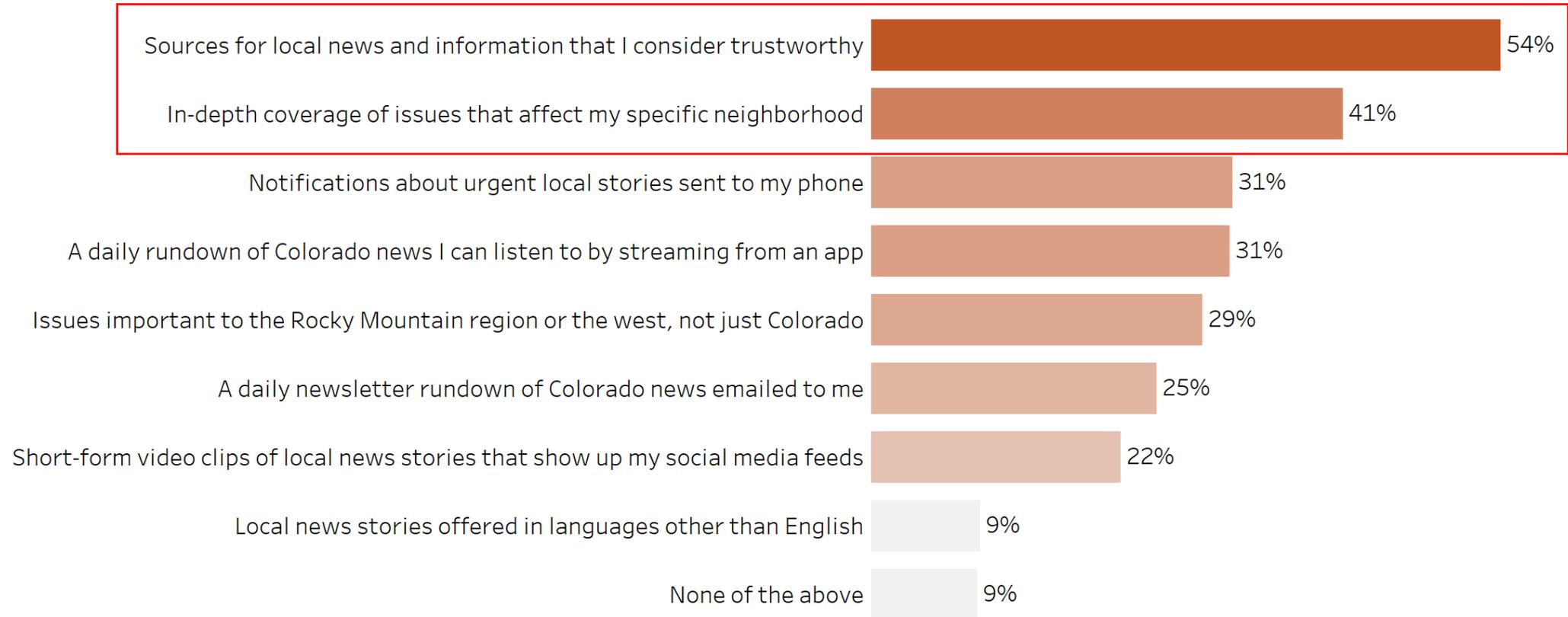
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Coloradans are looking for this in their *local* news specifically

Custom Question

 **Colorado
Public Radio**



Question text: When you are looking for news and information specifically about your local area, which of the following do you wish was more available to you personally? Select all that apply.

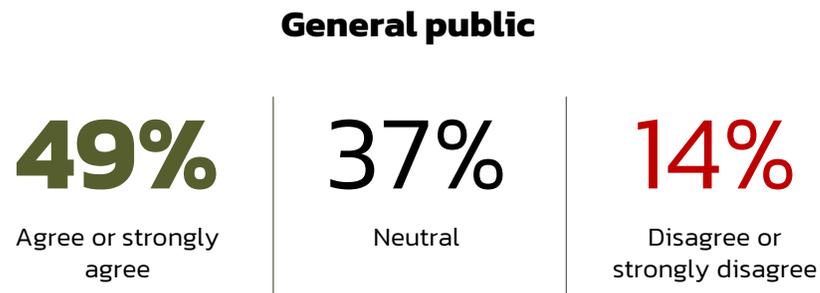


In Jacksonville, people are more likely to trust local news sources than national ones



“

“I’m more likely to trust a local news source than a national or international news source.”



Segments from the general public that were even more likely to agree or strongly agree:

- Respondents who identify themselves as **very conservative** (61%)
- **Parents of kids under 18** (55%)
- **Native Floridians** (52%)

Question text: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.





And while a simple majority value NPR as a news source, most don't rank it highly for trust

Question text:

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

"I think it's important to preserve and support NPR as a source for news."

51%
Agree or Strongly Agree

14%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree

"NPR is one of the most trusted news sources in the world."

39%
Agree or Strongly Agree

17%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree

"I'm not really sure what makes NPR unique as a source for news."

37%
Agree or Strongly Agree

27%
Disagree or Strongly Disagree

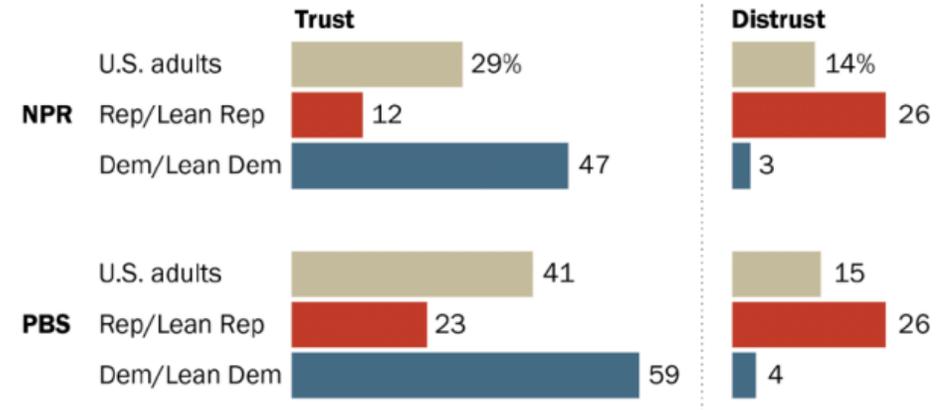


Insights beyond RUN

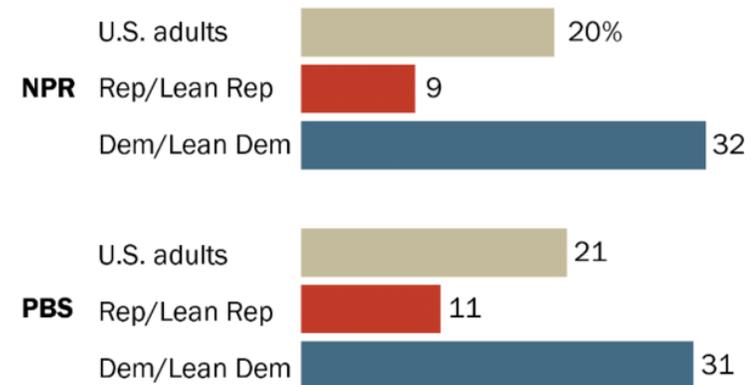
Recent Pew Research on Trust and Federal Funding for NPR / PBS

March 2025

% of U.S. adults who say they generally ____ each outlet as a source of news



% of U.S. adults who say they **regularly** get news from ...



Insights beyond RUN

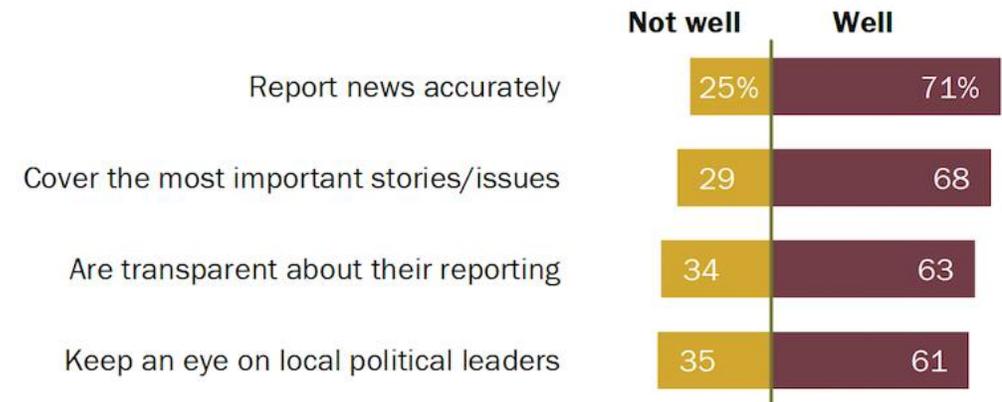
Pew Research on Americans' Changing Relationship With Local News

May 2024

“At a time when many local news outlets are struggling and Americans’ trust in the news media has waned, the vast majority of U.S. adults (85%) say local news outlets are at least somewhat important to the well-being of their local community.”

Most Americans say local media are doing well at different aspects of reporting

% of U.S. adults who say their local news media do each ...



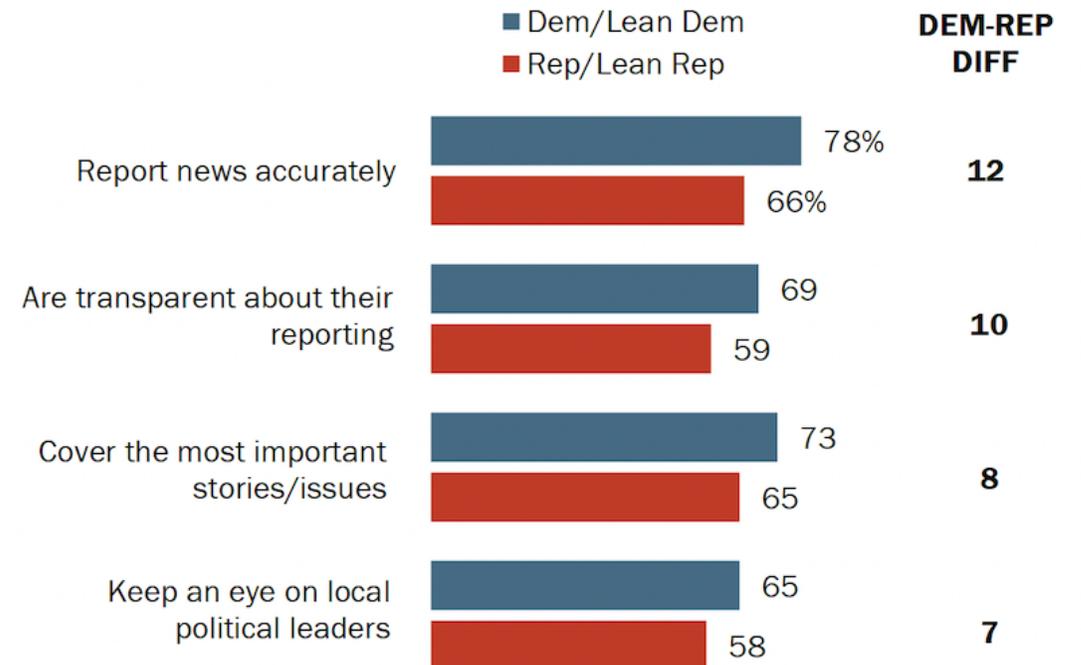
Insights beyond RUN

Pew Research on Americans' Changing Relationship With Local News

May 2024

Majorities of both political parties believe their local news media do various aspects of their jobs well

% of U.S. adults who say their local news media do each well



Trust Indicators

News transparency standards designed to make it easier for people to assess the credibility of the news they're reading.



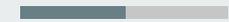
**The
Trust
Project**



Research conducted in 2017 by the University of Texas at Austin demonstrated that, when present, these indicators lifted users' evaluations of the news organization and improved intent to seek out more from the same news organization in the future

Would this still be true today? Or even *more* so? And how does this translate on social platforms?





Looking for hope





Political polarization has contributed to news fatigue

“The world has become so polarized that I don’t follow the news as much as I used to.”

48%

Agree or strongly agree

22%

Neutral

30%

Disagree or strongly disagree

Segments from the general public that were even more likely to agree or strongly agree:

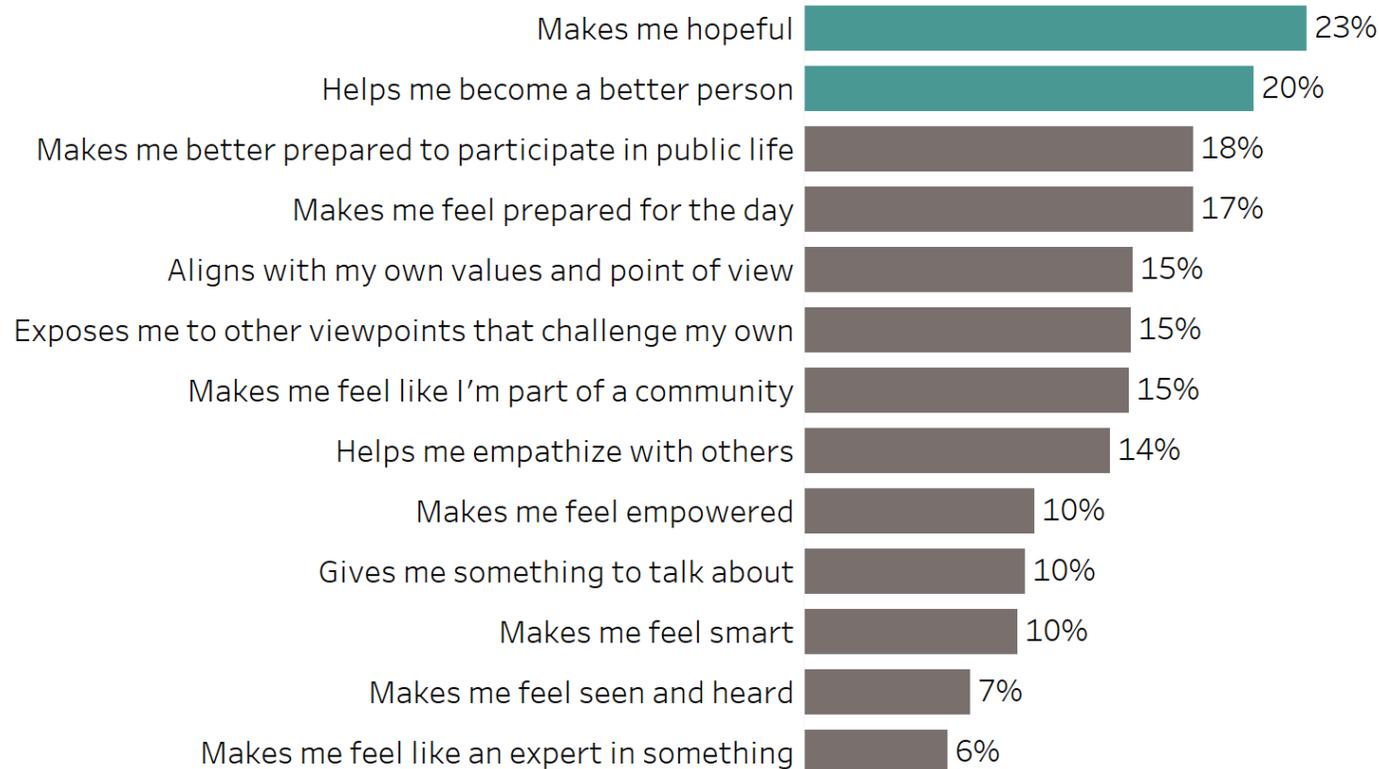
- **Gen-Zers** (54%) and **Millennials** (56%)
- **Rural** residents (54%)
- **Hispanic / Latinos** (51%)
- **Conservatives** (51%)



More hopeful storytelling is a top unmet need, but not seen as a public radio strength

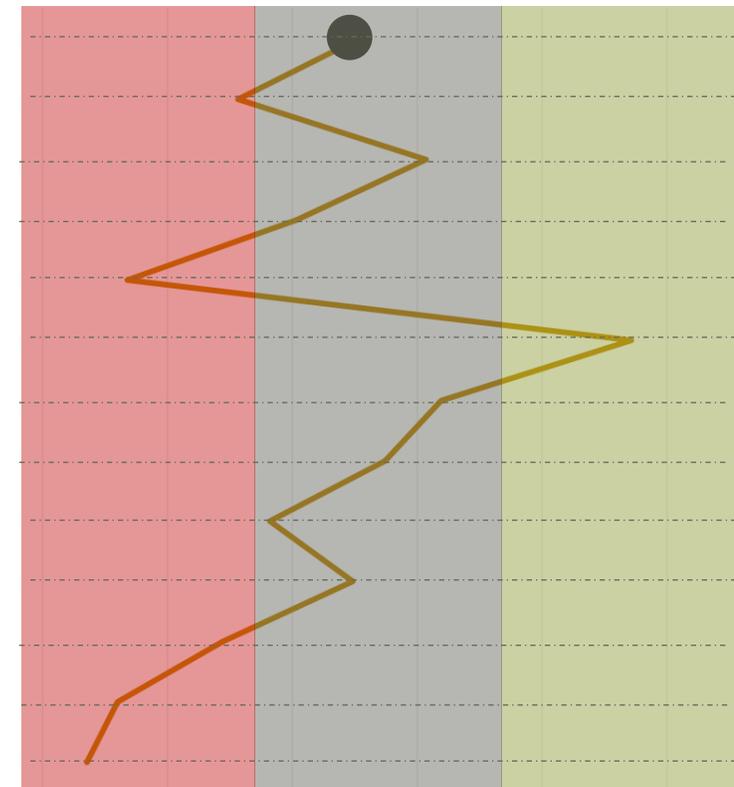
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Public Radio as a Go-To

Interested, not enough, AND public radio good at providing*



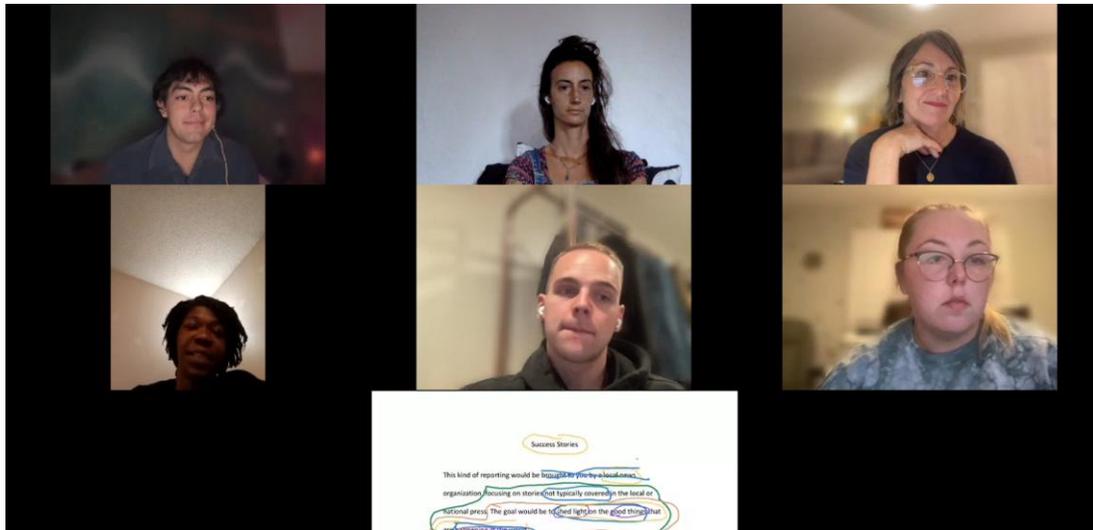
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Success Stories

This kind of reporting would be brought to you by a local news organization focusing on stories not typically covered in the local or national press. The goal would be to shed light on the positive things that people are doing in your community and in the world.



“

There's a reporter named Steve Hartman who always tells a super positive story. I think there's enough misery covered in the news that it would be nice to have something that covered some positive stuff to reduce my level of anxiety and convince me that there is some hope for humanity.

Eric, 63, Georgia – Local Station Listener

“

We often miss out on the local stuff, and I really appreciate the positive angle on this. Listening to the news, there's a steady drumbeat of negativity.

Gary, 44, California – Local Station Listener

“

I would like to hear more about normal people – this person helping that person, those kinds of things.

Karen, 72, Pennsylvania – Local Station Listener

“

I like the idea of a local news organization shedding [light on] positive things that people are doing in my community – and not just highlighting people, but highlighting groups of people, and also how you can also get involved in these groups. It's kind of promoting community.

Sherry, 53, California – Local Station Listener



“

“My local NPR station already incorporates these kinds of local stories, highlighting an initiative that's been happening [like] making sure that amphibians can cross the road during spring rain...Then, the next story will be about what's going on in Israel and Palestine – **but it gives me that moment, that deep breath that I think we all probably need.**”

Lisa, 51

Vermont – Local Station Listener



Insights beyond RUN

Audience Research around Solutions Journalism

SmithGeiger & Solutions Journalism Network
April 2021

51%

of respondents said they **preferred** the solutions journalism story they viewed versus **32%** for a corresponding problem-focused story.

61%

of respondents said the solutions-focused story was **interesting** to watch. For the problems-focused story, that number was **54%**.

88%

said a solutions journalism story they viewed left a **positive impression** on them, compared to **74%** for a comparable problem-focused story.

83%

of respondents said they **trusted** the solutions journalism story, compared to just **55%** who said the same about the problem-focused story.

+10%

more likely to say the solutions story changed their understanding of an issue and **would make them watch the station's coverage again.**

Insights beyond RUN

A Public Health Approach to Negative News: The 3-to-1 solution

American Journal of Health Promotion
May 2020

“There is clear evidence that the prevalence of negative media reporting has increased substantially over the past years. There is evidence that this negative reporting adversely affects social interactions, and thereby also health and well-being outcomes . . . Given the wide reach of negative media reporting and the contagion of such reporting and the resulting interactions, the effects on health are arguably substantial.

A commitment of news outlets to report one positive story for every 3 negative stories, and of news consumers to restrict attention to outlets that do, could dramatically alter practices and, consequently, population health.”

Instagram post from CPR News (@newsopr). The image shows two men standing in a field. The text overlay reads: "Hot springs at risk? A plan for Colorado's first geothermal power plant runs into heated opposition". The caption text includes: "newsopr and 2 others", "newsopr It's no mystery why Colorado is slowly shaping into the red-hot center of the rising U.S. geothermal industry. Data shows Colorado holds ample zero-carbon energy hidden below the surface. Unlike other hotbeds, Colorado's heat zones sit beneath or near major population centers, meaning many communities are well-positioned to take advantage of the novel energy source. Despite Colorado's geological good fortune, the state has experienced minimal geothermal development. Gov. Jared Polis is power plants and One of those projects". The post has 2,551 likes and was posted on April 22.

Colorado Public Radio

Website screenshot showing an article titled "Why CPR's climate team reported a series of stories about geothermal energy" by Sam Brasch and Ishan Thakore, dated Apr. 22, 2025, 4:00 am. The article includes a "LISTEN NOW" button (4min 03sec) and a "SHARE:" section with icons for Facebook, X, and Email. A large graphic at the bottom features the word "Hotspots" in a stylized font. The Denver Center for Performing Arts logo is also visible, with the text "CPR thanks our sponsors. Become a sponsor".



Parting takeaways

- No category of news and information is more broadly needed than **stories about one's own city, town, or neighborhood**. Particularly as the number of true local news options continues to contract, public media has a critical role to play and can grow its audience by doing so.
- No kind of storytelling is more broadly popular or needed than **in-depth stories brought to life through investigative reporting**. This kind of journalism appeals across the spectrum and works together with robust daily news coverage and live local events to reach people beyond the current base.
- In a world where media distrust is widespread, local news sources generally and public media organizations specifically are strongly positioned to meet the news consumer's **need for carefully researched storytelling worthy of their trust**.
- In a period of political polarization, news avoidance is a strong factor in several segments, many of whom are looking for the news they consume to instill hope and help them become better people. Storytelling that **focuses not only the problems, but also solutions**, stories about overcoming obstacles and achieving meaningful change, can help to reach some of the news averse.

Questions?



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ABOUT US

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City Square Associates is a marketing research and strategic consulting practice that utilizes a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to obtain and apply consumer insight.

For twenty-five years we've partnered with a broad range of clients, including major media companies, renowned educational and cultural institutions, leaders in the medical and life sciences field, as well as non-profits and community-based organizations.

In all that we do, we endeavor to transform data into meaning and meaning into action



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