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FOCUS GROUP REPORT

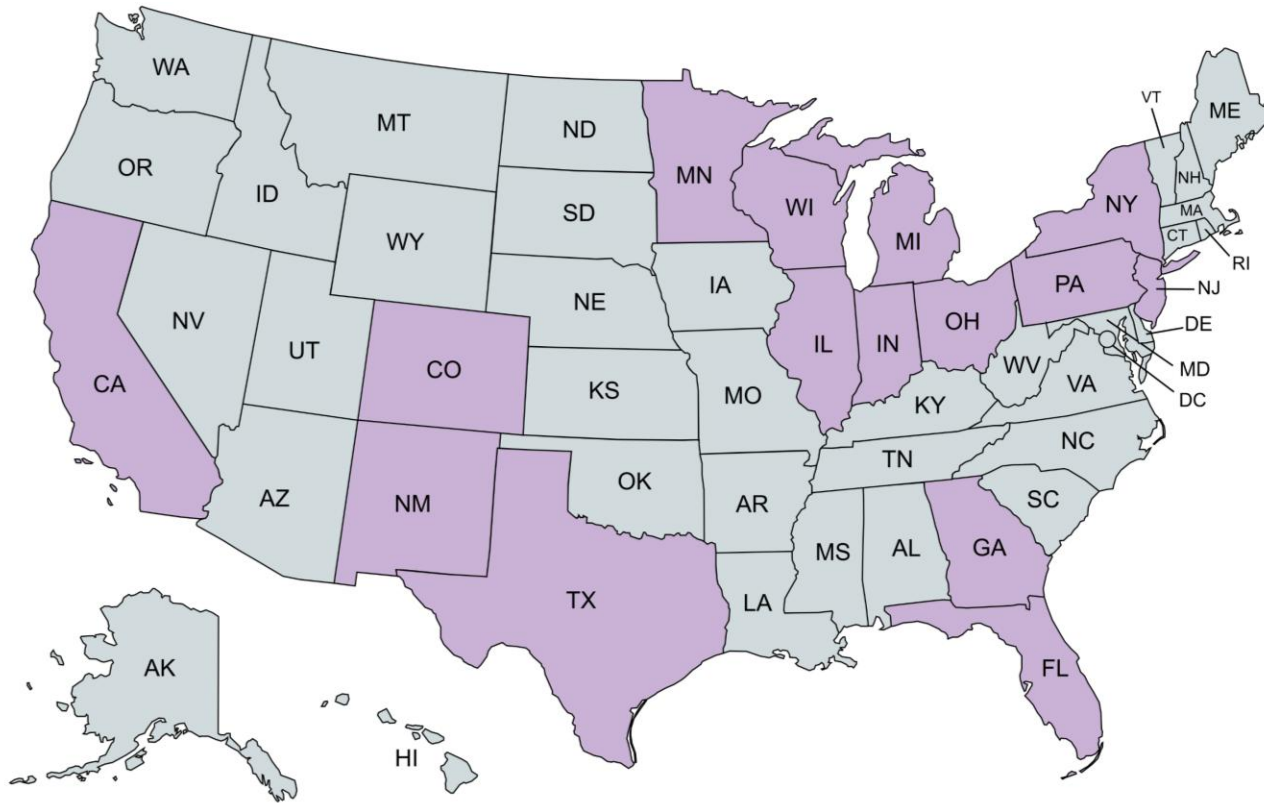
Wednesday, June 25, 2025

Democrats, Independents, and
Republicans on News Consumption



Methodology

On May 28-29, 2025, GBAO conducted four online focus groups with passive news consumers—those who say the news comes to them rather than seeking out the news—including a mix across partisanship, education, gender, and race.



- ❖ Group 1: Democratic and Democratic-leaning women who passively consume the news
- ❖ Group 2: Democratic and Democratic-leaning men who passively consume the news
- ❖ Group 3: Republican and Republican-leaning men who passively consume the news
- ❖ Group 4: Republican and Republican-leaning women who passively consume the news

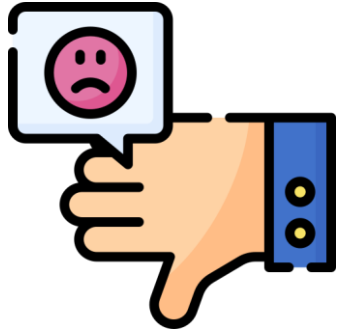
Key Takeaways

- These passive news consumers are generally negative about the state of the country, and even Trump voters are not happy about the economy.
- Many avoid the news because it makes them sad, or they simply turn their attention elsewhere.
- Among these passive consumers, “casual” online content is not always trustworthy, nor is it particularly engaging.
- Yet, it’s frequently shared between friends or served up by the algorithm.
- Example content that includes facts lands better than those that don’t.
- Many dream of positive news or news that presents “just the facts.”

The Mood About the Country Is Downbeat

Moderator: How are you feeling about the way things are going in the country today?

"It's kind of something my sister and I say to each other almost every day. We're like, '**Everything is terrible. It's 2025.**' That just kind of is how it feels right now. There's just always so much negativity coming out and horrible things happening to people, like with the deportations, and I don't know if we're just focusing on the U.S., but everything going on in Israel and Gaza. So yeah, kind of been a down year." – MI woman, weak Democrat



"I think my thinking is more like what's bad, but if I could say something that's good is... **Honestly, I could probably name 10 negative things...**" – NY man, weak Democrat

"I think it's been a couple years now where it's like your average American has a lot of patriotism and all good, and you're allowed to do that. You should love your country. **But I don't think you can feel very proud of a country that's not looking very well, not economically, not politically.**" – NM woman, weak Republican

"[I'm] unsure... **[There is] just a lot of uncertainty being involved with what's going on in the country right now.** I mean, you could pinpoint a few things, but with so much that's going on, the scale has been going so far up and down right now as to what is going to settle on." – TX man, weak Republican

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Many—Even Trump Voters—Are Worried About the Economy

Moderator: How do you think the economy is doing right now?

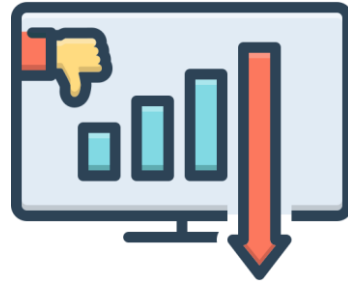
“Our grocery prices have gone up. [Because of] the pipeline in Texas, our gas has not gone up, but **everything is more expensive, and it will get more expensive.** And I'm watching my 401(k) go down, down, down, up for a little bit, down. It's manipulation in the worst possible way.” – TX woman, weak Republican

“Well, if you look at the economy right now, it has not got any better. It's gotten worse... [Moderator: And who do you blame for that?] Well, I blame Trump. And during his first presidency, the only thing he managed to do is leave with the U.S. in so much debt that he created. And he likes to deflect and tries to blame Biden for his mistakes. And now he's trying to make it worse now. The thing with the tariffs, they're not going anywhere.” – TX man, weak Republican

“I'm a little confused about these tariffs. I was just buying a new iPhone this week and I'm Googling, ‘How much is this going to cost in a month? How much does it cost now?’ I need things, explained [to] me a little bit with that. **So I would say I am not really sure how that's going, but it's confusing.**” – NY woman, weak Democrat

“You go to the store, and my gosh, it's a lot of money for basics like food. Go to a restaurant and we're spending \$70 when we were spending \$30 before. **Everything's really gone up. So, that's part of the economy.**” – NM man, independent lean Democrat

“I think the economy too is bad and is going to get worse. I don't think the current leadership in this country knows what the hell they're doing. I think they're completely incompetent, and I think that's a major problem.” – NY man, independent lean Democrat



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More Feel Pessimistic About the Country's Days Ahead Than Optimistic

Moderator: Do you think America's best days are ahead of us, behind us, or are they happening now?

"[Behind us.] I just feel that it was just easier back in the days... Families could thrive and survive with a mom-and-pop store. They can afford their rent, afford to send their kids to a nice school and things like that. But once all these retailers, like the Amazons, the Targets, the Walmarts started opening up, it kind of had a domino effect where these smaller stores had to close up shop, people lost their jobs, people lost their apartments, their houses, and I think that just triggered something." – NY man, weak Democrat

"[Behind us.] I just think the '50s, '60s, the '80s, those decades were just better... The world wasn't so divided. Not the world, our country... But I think people didn't hate you because you were a Republican or vice versa. And people could just talk politics at the dinner table even if you voted for the other guy." – CA woman, weak Republican

"Our president is going to drive us into the ground and it's getting worse every single day. Even the post on Memorial Day honoring the veterans is one example. That was so disrespectful, and the cadets could not shake his hand because they have a moral code... Our best days are currently behind us. I don't see any bright horizon in the next 3 1/2 years." – TX woman, weak Republican

"[Behind us.] Because if you look at the current state of, let's say education, the kids nowadays are not being taught anything. Education has de-evolved. They're trying to defund the public education system. Trump and his cronies are going after the education that we grew up in, which is very different in my time." – TX man, weak Republican

[Moderator: You said the country's best days are behind us. Why?] **"Well, I just think, I mean, so many things that were guaranteed for people like Medicare and Social Security, when those started, those were a godsend for people. That's how they survived. And I feel like the people that are of that age now are doing okay. It's not stretching as far as they need it to. But for us, I mean, I don't think those programs are going to be around."** – FL woman, weak Democrat

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People Report Hearing Many “Quick Hit” Type Stories

Moderator: What news stories are you paying attention to lately?

“The transgender athletes. I know some states are banning it. I think the law passed, if I'm not mistaken, you guys can correct me, but I know California is in trouble again because someone won there in one game or one sport, a transgender athlete won again and Trump is not happy with it.” – GA man, weak Republican



“There was that whole thing, it was circulating all over the internet about transgender rats, when he first got into office, something about transgender mice or something.” – GA woman, weak Republican

“I mean, it seems to me just kind of ridiculous... The Trump derangement syndrome, that was actually proposed by a senator or Congress. I mean, what is that? It just seems like a joke. I mean, and so many of our rights that I had, my daughter, who's 11 now, she's not going to have. I mean, at this point, if things keep going the way [they are], and it's really disheartening.” – FL woman, weak Democrat

“I mean, just today or yesterday, I didn't read the articles but I saw that there was a lot of mention about a cut, like a \$9 million cut with DOGE.” – NY man, weak Democrat

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Some Are Following the “Big Beautiful Bill” Debate But Are Unclear On What Democrats Are Doing

Moderator: What have you heard about what Democrats and Republicans are doing in Congress?

“[Democrats are] not being listened to enough. I don't get the specific details of a lot of things, but I just know that it doesn't seem like there's enough of them. To where it just doesn't seem like there's a good balance of power anymore.” – TX woman, weak Democrat

“It feels like, especially over the past year but really over the past five months that the Democratic Party has been aggressively fragmented... And I think it's not only that way in terms of the leadership of the party, but I think the constituents [too].” – CO man, independent

“In my mind, it seems like [Democrats are] just in flux and they're still regrouping and trying to organize. I haven't heard much. I mean, you do hear the usual stuff and just complaining about just all the usual stuff that's going on.” – NM man, independent lean Democrat

“[Trump] signed a lot of different things into order already. A lot of different executive orders has already come down... You might hear somebody speaking about his ‘Big Beautiful Bill’ or any other thing that he's getting ready to actually sign into law...” – TX man, weak Republican

“I know that some of the Republicans did not vote for the ‘Big Beautiful Tax Bill.’” – TX man, independent lean Republican

“Well, [Republicans are] trying to pass the ‘Big Beautiful Bill,’ but there's so many things being put in that bill, which adds to our debt... [Moderator: What kinds of things are they trying to pass?] I don't know exactly, but every bill that's ever passed, they tack on all kinds of other things, so I'm not sure specifically.” – CA woman, weak Republican

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Many Report Having Done Their Own Research To Evaluate Or Create Balance Between “CNN and Fox”

“If I do find something that's some sort of news source or whatever, I usually check it across multiple platforms to kind of even out the bias, if that makes any sense. So if I find that okay, someone like Fox News, they're typically leaning more to the right, I can then look at something that leans a little more left and then kind of hopefully meet in the middle somewhat.” – NY man, independent lean Republican

“So nowadays that we have AI, I can just easily Gemini, the actual news out there, find out some like, ‘Okay, so somebody said this one, is this true? What's really the reality on this one?’” – GA man, weak Republican

“I believe CNN is more Democrat and Fox is Republican, so I try to get an unbiased view by looking at both and then deciding or Google searching. Sometimes my friend will send me articles. Like the other day, my friend sent me about the Medicare cuts. So then I looked into it and then I saw a clip where Trump said, ‘I'm not cutting Medicare and Medicaid.’ So I try to find full clips of what he actually said. It can be hard to find accurate information, though, since it is the internet.” – NY woman, weak Republican

“I hear someone talking about something, I really don't just immediately believe what they say. I try to do my own research from a trusted source, and if I see a sensationalized headline about it that's from a source that I wouldn't think is maybe as trustworthy, I might dig in a little more.” – MI woman, independent lean Democrat

“And I wish that there was at least one definitive source that collectively everyone could just say, ‘Yes, they are only talking about the facts.’ I wouldn't even care if it was something you see on TV, like a traditional news show or if it was something like social media where you're flipping through different articles. I don't care what it looks like. I just wish there was one definitive source where it's just the facts and nothing more.” – CO man, independent

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But One's "Just the Facts" Preference Depends On Your Partisan Viewpoint

"I'd rather hear from both sides, but it's hard when sometimes either side is not really giving you full information and you still have to go out and do it yourself." – MI woman, weak Democrat



"It has to be just the facts that you're saying. Just the facts. But both sides..." – NM man, independent lean Democrat

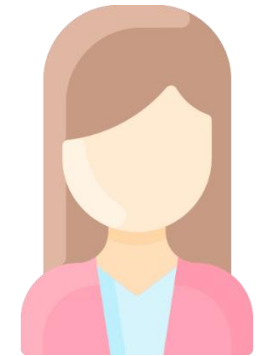
"Especially [with] this current administration... I ended up doing a serious deep dive. I pulled open probably a dozen different news sources... So basically what I found is there is a wide range of opinions, and the best way to do independent research is just to cross-reference as many sources as possible." – CO man, Independent

"Well, up to a certain point, most news networks were actually pretty good at reporting the news without any kind of bias. But ever since Trump got into the picture, and when he didn't like a story about him or just something he didn't like in general, and started labeling it fake news, and most of his supporters started falling into his version of reality." – TX man, weak Republican

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Friends and Family Sharing Content Are a Clear Indicator

"I have, luckily, friends from across the range of ideologies, but I don't have cable on my TV. I don't really even know how to get news on the TV or any shows that are on. So I feel like [the news I get is] what my friends are sharing or their friends, and that's how it trickles into me." – NY woman, weak Democrat



"My husband's a big fan of keeping up on the news, so quite often I get news from him. And I can just go from on and go off things that are interesting to me, look them up more." – WI woman, weak Republican

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Non-Traditional, Online, Or More Casual News Sources Are Not Always Trustworthy, as “Anyone” Can Participate

“As much as I love social media, I don't get all my information from content creators because I know that that stuff is just totally opinions.” – GA woman, weak Republican

“If you go on TikTok, you'll hear probably a thousand of those conversations going on repeatedly, just from scrolling through. But the thing about it is it's all opinionated. None of it is actually giving factual information... It's just like everything is coming straight up off the top of the dome. And now we talking about it because it came across of somebody's mind randomly.” – GA man, weak Republican



“... The facts are rare and then most of the people, the influencers, they already have their own biased opinion. Their content is provided for a certain audience usually, and that's how they got all their followers. So it's kind of biased, so it's kind of hard to tell. So I guess you kind of just take it with a grain of salt.” – MN man, weak Republican

“I'm just not a fan of this type of reporting, I guess. I feel like these people are influencers that get paid for every video that they put out. There's [an] ulterior motive behind all this, and that's to make money.” – CO man, independent

“... Often [you] come across these people, I mean influencers, I guess you want to call them that, take it upon themselves to report what's going on. Yeah, some of it might make sense and some of it might be factual, but I always question the integrity of what they're reporting because it's like, who are you?” – NY man, weak Democrat

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Many Dream Of Positive News About Good Things and People Getting Along

"I would put the positive out there, like, 'This is what's going on in the community.' And there was a lemonade stand in the Chicago Sky game today. Girls put up a lemonade stand. They wanted to raise money to go to a Chicago Sky game. And the Chicago Sky had them at the game, gave them tickets, gave them merch and everything. So it's like that's something positive." – IL woman, weak Republican

"I look for the stories I guess, that are compassionate or that are less conflicting or hurtful to others is where I'm at. I just want everybody, I'm a Libra, I just want everything to be balanced, and so I get frustrated when I don't see all of that." – TX woman, weak Democrat

"[The news is] just too depressing. Honestly, I don't want to keep hearing what Trump is up to or what he's doing now, or I just don't want to follow it." – PA woman, independent

"I mean, every time I turn it on, it just shows people enduring some type of suffering, whether it's financial, emotional, mental. Things never seem to be going right for a large group of people. I feel like you just feel bad watching the news because there's nothing that you can do to help anyone. Sometimes there's nothing you can do to help yourself. You're amongst the people suffering as well. And it's just a constant reminder every time you watch the news like, 'Damn, I'm struggling over here.' So sometimes it's just best to just turn it off." – NY man, weak Democrat



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Although Many Are Not Looking For New Ways To Engage With Nor Seek Community Through Political Content

Moderator: Do you feel engaged in an online political community?

"I don't like engaging or watching political content in that manner. I mean, as far as political content goes, I just like watching news that I trust. I don't like engaging in political entertainment in that [TikTok] method." – IN man, weak Republican



"I don't feel like I need to really be watching the news if I can't make any changes to what's happening... Luckily the politics are staying off my TikTok right now. I have a lot of other garbage that's more entertaining..." – NY woman, weak Democrat

"I don't. I consider them entertainment. For X and Snapchat and sometimes even Instagram, I don't usually get information from there. But I do go on those sites and most times it's just time-wasting, but not for political information. I rely on the news outlets." – TX woman, weak Republican

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Our Sample Content Suggests Facts Are More Important Than Jokes Or Vibes

"I think the humor is good. It kind of sounds educational, but the facts are not there, so I just think it's funny. I haven't seen that one 'cause I don't have TikTok. But I just think it's funny, but it's just also factchecking somebody like, 'Okay, who are you? Let's check your sources. Are they facts or not?'" – GA man, weak Republican

"If I want an opinion, somebody else's opinion or something like that, I will search that out myself. I don't necessarily want it popping up on my Facebook all the time or whatever." – CA woman, independent

"I feel it's creative, but it's not something I would watch because it's not factual. It's someone's own perspective of what they think, so I would just keep scrolling too." – NY woman, weak Republican

"That was exhausting. And I don't really feel like she had as many facts." – FL woman, weak Democrat



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There Were Some Clear Differences In How People Digested Political Satire

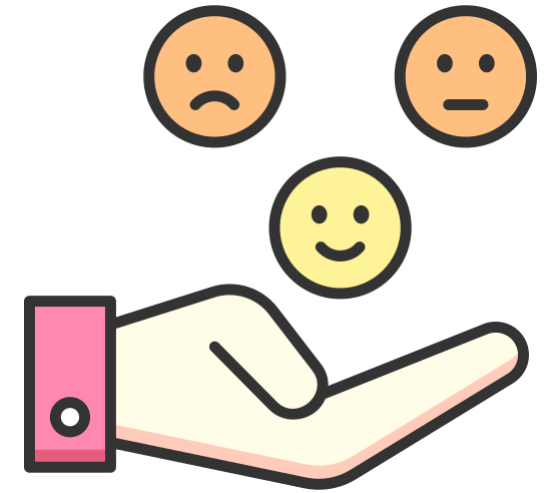
"I don't know how much information [I got]. It went by really fast, so there was some stuff that I missed, but I thought it was very entertaining. I thought it was very funny and it made me laugh and think a little bit." – NY man, independent lean Democrat

"I thought it was weird how she was doing stuff... Made it a joke, but I just didn't go with it. It wasn't my style." – NJ man, weak Democrat

"Yeah, definitely it seems like it's the younger crowd. To me, she was annoying, very unprofessional, but trying to get her point across, so yeah, very unprofessional." – WI woman, weak Republican

"I had to close my eyes, hopefully she's really not that stupid in real life. I pray to God she's not. But yeah, I had to close my eyes." – CA woman, independent

"I think parts of it were pretty humorous. I mean, you just got to take it with a grain of salt because it's not like they're presenting facts or anything. They're just burning observations, and I think a lot of it's true. So I thought it was pretty humorous. I think people just have to take out the seriousness of it all once on TikTok, because it's just one person ranting." – NY man, independent lean Republican

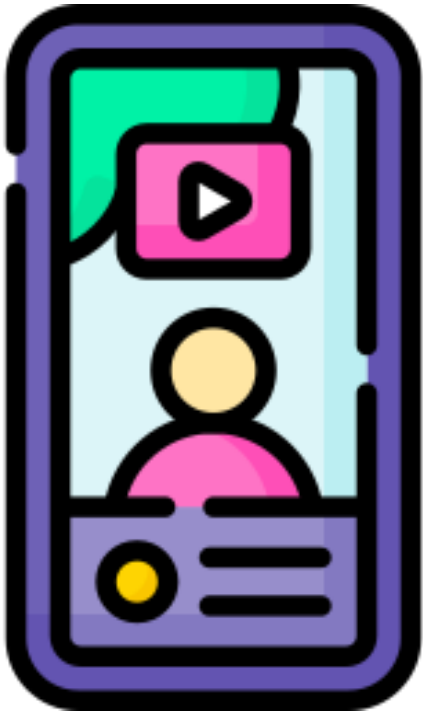


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Facts Alone Can't Overcome a Tone That Seems Strident

Moderator: What did you think about this video?

"Honestly, what he's saying is important, but **because the way he presents it, you would've lost me a long time ago before he actually got to the important stuff.**" – NM woman, weak Republican



"Oh, he **was invested**. I mean it related to him specifically, and so he was speaking honestly. I felt like he was being more honest because it did affect him." – TX woman, independent

"He was not obnoxious. **He was stating facts [about] what happened at his pharmacy, and that is actually truly happening.**" – TX woman, weak Republican

"I can see myself watching that because it wasn't just his opinion. He was actually backing it up with facts ... [I] can see myself watching stuff like that because it's not scripted. It's not you being told what you can and cannot say on TV. It's his real feelings in that moment, and it's really in real time." – MI woman, weak Democrat

"I felt like it was attacking the other side like Republicans. **He could have done it in more respectable way with his tone and his words.** He did have a good point starting off with the HIV thing." – NY woman, weak Republican

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And a Kind Tone Can't Overcome Content That Seems Contrived Or Too Light

Moderator: What did you think about this video?

"I get what he was trying to do, but I felt that every time he would pause and turn his head and look at the camera, I found that a little bit corny. Part of it also felt like I watched Sesame Street with my young daughter and this episode where Elmo was trying to teach you something." – NY man, weak Democrat

"I watch those all the time. Interesting ways of cooking different stuff. I haven't seen him, but so that caught my attention. I **was focused** and then he **switched it to the political**. I thought it was interesting, so it kept me listening." – NM man, independent lean Democrat

"Seemed like it was a Saturday Night Live skit. It's like **it was supposed to be something positive**, but he was taking potshots in a negative way." – TX man, weak Republican

"It's a little bit of teaching and it's a little bit of giving someone's point of view, but I think it comes from a very respectful way to do that." – TX woman, weak Republican



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Recommendations

- **Grab attention through your own mix of personality, facts, and authenticity:** To get the attention of passive news consumers, content creators must tell an authentic personal story and present verifiable facts. But even the facts are more likely to land if they align with Americans' existing opinions.
- **Anyone has the potential to be a trusted "reporter" with facts and the right demeanor:** Passive news consumers have a disrupted sense of authority in the new media environment. One respondent said, "Who are you?" in reaction to one video we showed. These passive news consumers are looking for trusted "reporters" to share information with them. They long for a time when they could just trust the person who was telling them the news. Content creators can earn that trust with solid facts and a demeanor that earns the trust of viewers.
- **Shake the gloom:** Passive news consumers are weighted down by a news cycle that feels interminably bad. Content creators can win attention from these Americans by popping in with good news and feel-good stories from time to time. As one respondent suggested, "Tell the story of a lemonade stand." This should not ignore the real challenges people face, but occasionally, Americans just need a break.

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About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO along with an advisory committee, including: Jessica Floyd, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds; Mike Podhorzer; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Center for American Progress Action Fund; Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

About the Study

GBAO conducted four online focus groups May 28-29, 2025 with Democratic, independent, and Republican passive news consumers across the country. Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

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To learn more about Navigator:

<http://navigatorresearch.org>

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