

Topic: Freedom of the press

Background

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects freedom of speech and freedom of the press. A free press is often seen as a hallmark of a healthy democracy. At its best, it informs citizens on issues and events that impact their lives and allows them to hold the politicians that serve them accountable.

In recent years, there has been a lot of discussion about both the state of press freedom in the United States and whether there is ever a legitimate reason for freedom of the press to be restricted.

Public opinion polling says ...

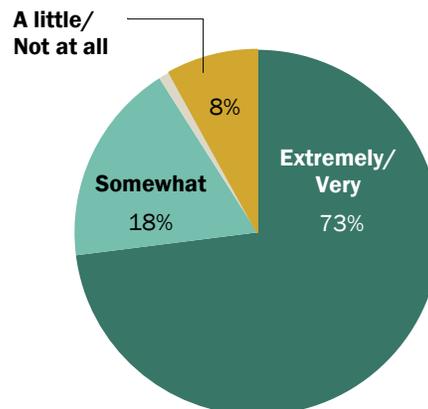
Pew Research Center asked a representative sample of American adults about press freedom in April 2024.

Here's what we found:

- **73%** of adults say that freedom of the press is extremely or very important to the well-being of society, with 44% saying this is extremely important.
- **18%** say it's somewhat important.
- **8%** say it is a little or not at all important, with only 2% saying this is not at all important.

Public views on freedom of the press

% saying the freedom of the press is ___ important to the well-being of society



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer is shown but not labeled.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 1-7, 2024.

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How views differ by education

Majorities of adults with different levels of education say freedom of the press is extremely or very important to the well-being of society. But there are differences in the shares who say this.

- **85%** of adults with a bachelor's degree or more education say press freedom is extremely or very important.
- **71%** of those with some college education but no four-year degree say this.
- **63%** of those with a high school diploma or less education say the same.

Views on press freedom by education

% saying the freedom of the press is **extremely or very important** to the well-being of society



Note: "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 1-7, 2024.

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What the public says about how press freedom works in the U.S.

That same survey in April 2024 included more questions on this topic that went beyond whether press freedom is important or not for the well-being of society. It's worth noting that this survey was done many months before the 2024 presidential election. It's possible that views on this topic could have changed since the election.

When it comes to whether the press in the U.S. is free to do its job, a third of adults say the media is *completely* free to report the news. Almost half – 46% – say the media is *somewhat* free to do this, and 21% say the media is either not very or not at all free to report the news.

Many Americans think news outlets are influenced by outside forces.

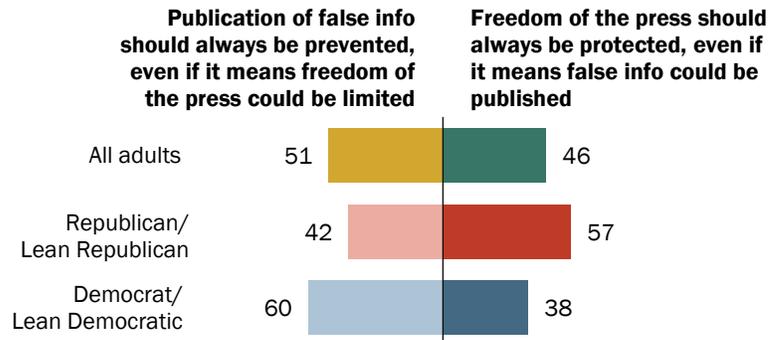
- 51% of adults say U.S. news organizations are *influenced by corporations and financial interests* a great deal. An additional 33% say they are influenced somewhat by these interests.
- A similar share – 49% – say news organizations are *influenced by government or political interests* a great deal; 34% say they are influenced somewhat by these interests.

The public is divided over how to balance the importance of press freedom with the need to prevent the spread of inaccurate information.

- 46% say freedom of the press should always be protected, even if it means false information could be published.
- 51% say publication of false information should always be prevented, even if it means freedom of the press could be limited.
- These views differ by party. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say freedom of the press should always be protected, even if it means false information could be published.

Views on protecting press freedom vs. preventing the spread of misinformation

% saying ...



Note: Shares of respondents who didn't offer an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 1-7, 2024.

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What do journalists themselves think?

In 2022, Pew Research Center conducted a survey of over 12,000 journalists based in the U.S. This survey found that:

- 57% of journalists surveyed were either extremely or very concerned about potential restrictions on press freedoms in the U.S. This is higher than the share of *American adults* who said in 2024 that they were concerned about this – 41%.
- 71% of journalists said that made-up news and information was a very big problem in the U.S. at the time the survey was conducted. But in 2024, the American public expressed less concern about this – 49% said they were concerned.

Discussion questions

- Did anything about this data surprise you?
- Why do you think we see differences in views about press freedom by education?
- What do you think is more important, protecting press freedom or protecting the public from misinformation?

Additional information

Use this QR code to view a web version of this brief and to visit the publications below:



A more detailed analysis of [Pew Research Center's 2024 survey on views of press freedom](#)

Data on [public views of the news media's watchdog role](#).

More on [public views about restrictions on false information and violent content online](#)

[Pew Research Center's 2022 survey of U.S. journalists](#)