

How Media Habits Shape American Foreign Policy Views

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Over the last decade, the decline of traditional news outlets and rise of algorithmic social media feeds have dramatically reshaped how information is generated and shared. In this evolving media landscape, findings from the 2025 Chicago Council Survey, fielded July 18–30, 2025, offer critical insight into how Americans’ media consumption habits shape their understanding of the world around them and the United States’ role in it.

The data reveal sharp divides in foreign policy attitudes across media ecosystems, with significant implications on public support for global leadership in the coming decades. The means of political communication that once mobilized Americans around the importance of a strong international presence no longer resonate with younger generations in particular, whose political socializations are increasingly taking place online and in a time of political upheaval. Given these trends, it is imperative that the case for active global participation be conveyed through the channels and platforms where younger audiences are most receptive.

Key Findings

- Americans are more interested in news about the US economy (50% very interested) than national news (38%) or news about the relations of the United States with other countries (36%).
- Most Americans source their news from broadcast networks like ABC, CBS, or NBC News and cable networks like Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC (now MS NOW) (34% combined) or digital media outlets like social media, podcasts, and YouTube (27%), but there is a major generational divide.

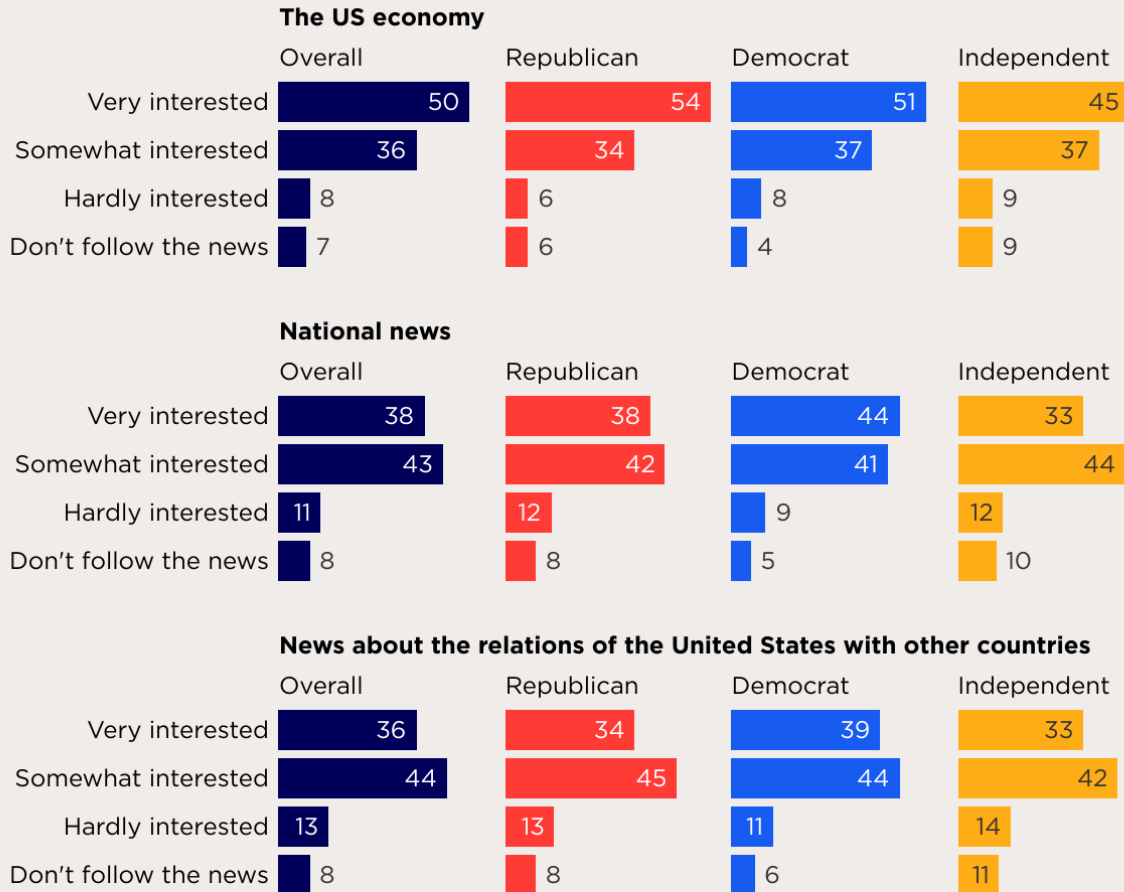
- Pluralities of Generation Z (46%) and Millennial (37%) Americans say digital media outlets are their primary sources of news about the world, while older generations tend to tune in to broadcast networks and Fox News, in particular.
- Americans across the board find it difficult to determine if news and information about US foreign policy is true or not (63%, 36% easy to determine), though audiences of broadcast networks, local media outlets, and digital platforms are more likely to express difficulty judging the accuracy of information than cable news and major newspapers' audiences.

Americans Most Interested in News about US Economy

These days, news about the US economy is of the greatest interest to Americans (85% net interested, 50% very interested), but eight in 10 are at least somewhat interested in reports about national news (81%) and the relations of the United States with other countries (79%).

Interest in News across Partisans

When you follow the news these days, how interested are you in reports about the following? (%)



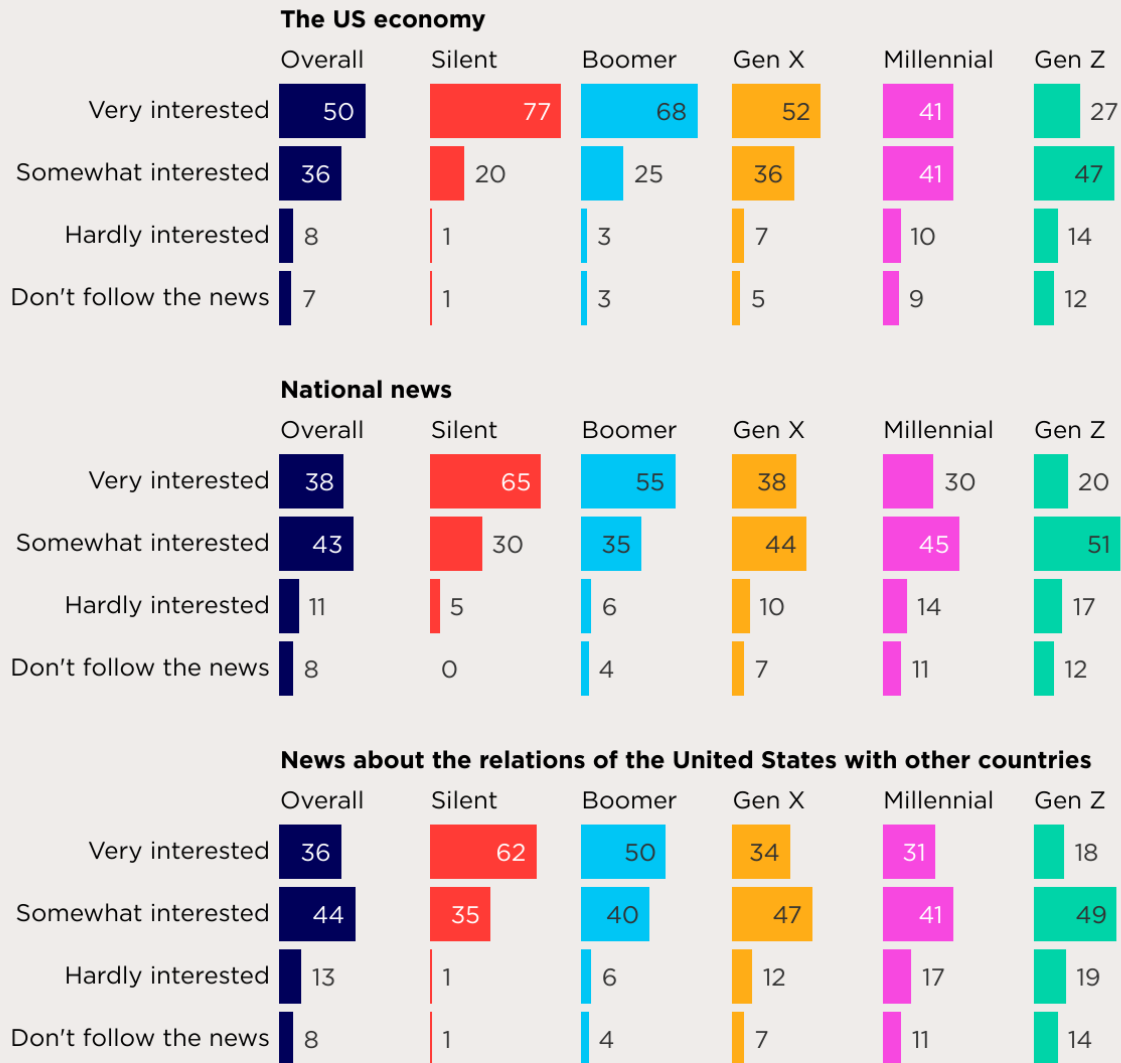
July 18-30, 2025 | n=2,148
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The data show that across the board, regardless of partisanship or generation, Americans are more interested in reports about the US economy than they are in domestic or international news—though majorities are at least somewhat interested in each of these topics. The data further show that each incremental generation seems to follow news more frequently than the generation following it. For example, much smaller percentages of Millennials and Generation Z Americans are interested in following news on these topics than older generations.

Interest in News across Generations

When you follow the news these days, how interested are you in reports about the following?



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Major News Networks and Social Media Are Americans' Primary News Sources

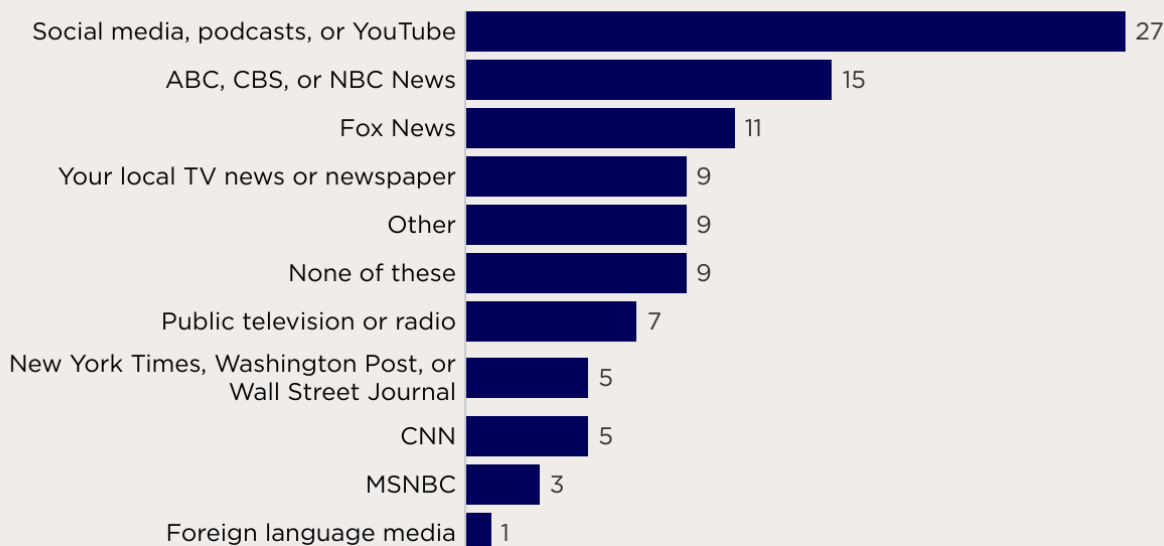
Americans today navigate an increasingly fragmented and complex information environment, with broadcast and cable news networks competing with social media and other user-generated platforms to shape public understanding of domestic issues and global affairs.

Combined, a third of Americans say broadcast networks like ABC, CBS, or NBC News (15%) and cable networks like Fox News (11%), CNN (5%), and MSNBC (3%) (now MS NOW) are their main source of news about what is going on in the world (34% total). A smaller but sizable share say digital media platforms like social media, podcasts, or YouTube are their primary sources of news (27%).

Smaller shares of Americans say they mainly get their news from local TV or newspapers (9%), public television or radio (7%), or newspapers like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, or *Wall Street Journal* (5%)—and even fewer tune in to foreign language media (1%).

Main Source of News

In the last month, which of these is your main source of news about what is going on in the world? (%)

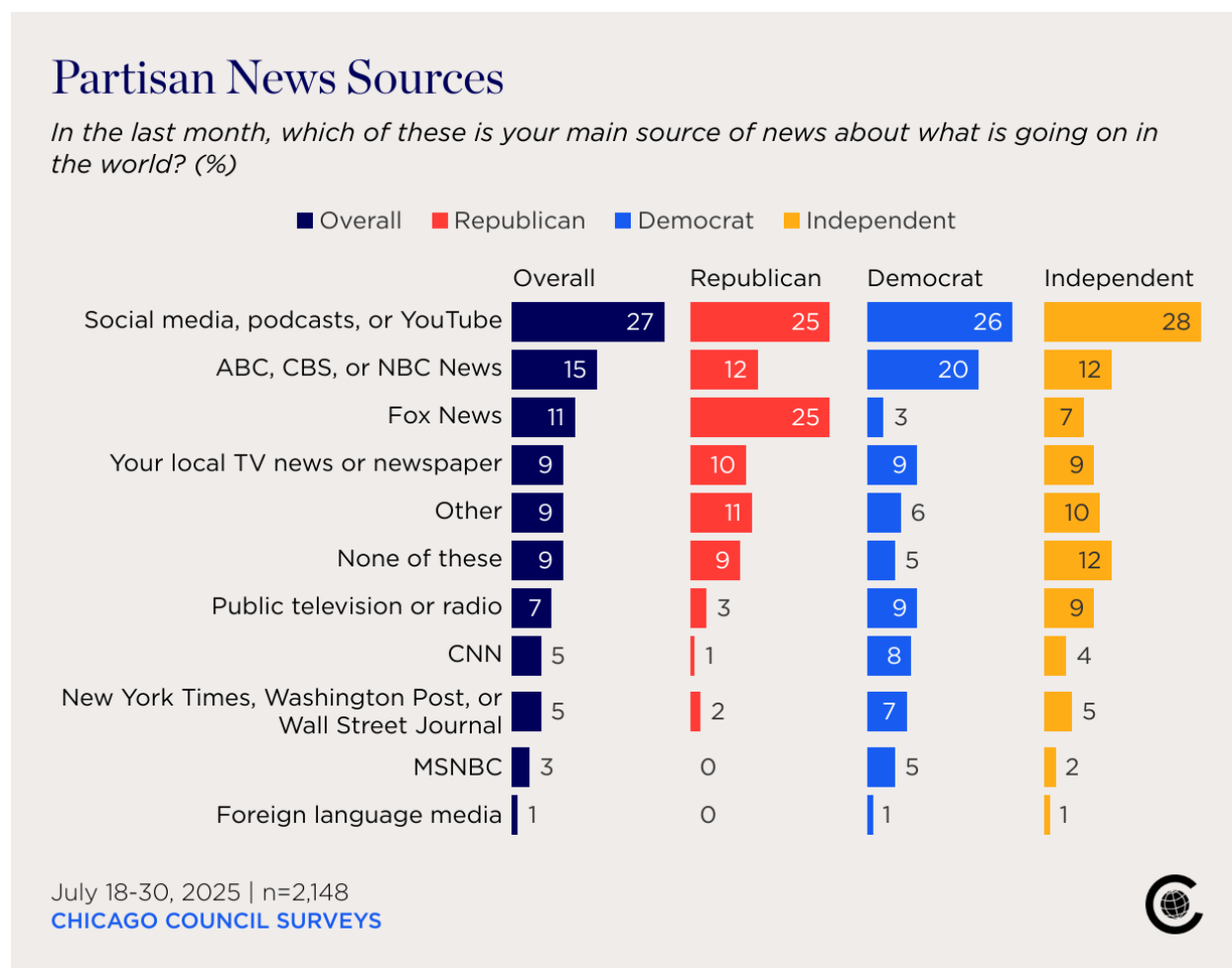


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Finally, 9 percent of Americans say they don't tune in to any of the listed sources, and an equal share says other outlets are their primary source of news (9%). In open-ended responses among those who tune in to other news sources, many express keeping up with outlets like AP News, Reuters, Breitbart, or Al Jazeera; browsing online news aggregators like Yahoo or Apple News; or even getting their news from family members.

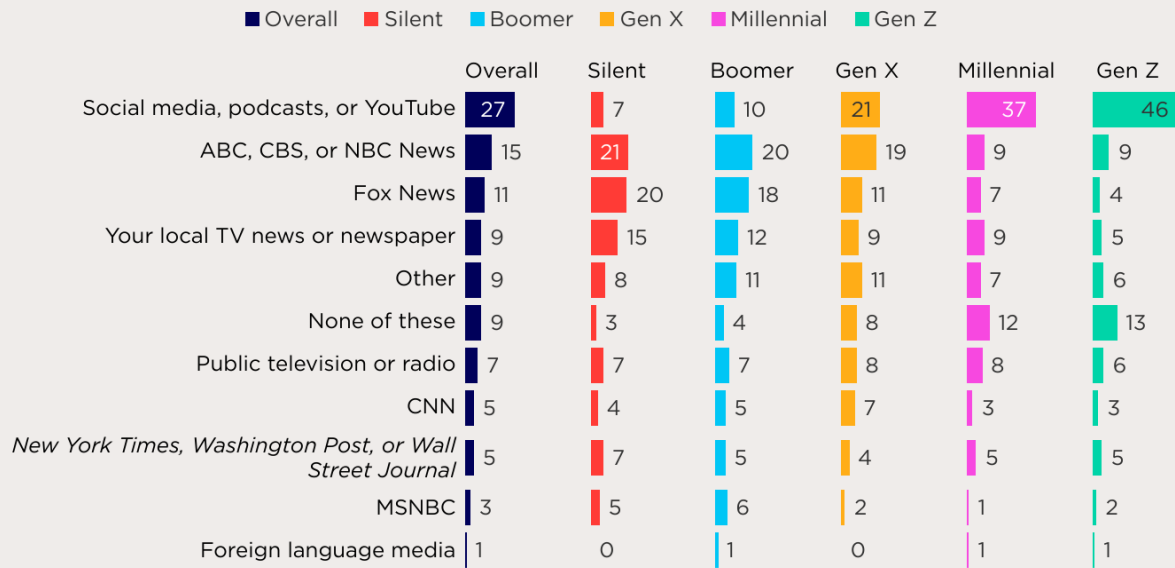
There are some partisan differences in Americans' media outlets of choice. Democrats and Independents tend to stay informed through social media, podcasts, or YouTube (26% and 28%, respectively) and by tuning in to broadcast networks like ABC, CBS, or NBC News (20% and 12%). Republicans also tend to follow the news on digital media platforms (25%) but prefer tuning in to Fox News (25%) more than other broadcast or cable news networks.



There are even starker differences in where Americans get their news across generations. Nearly half of Generation Z (46%) and a plurality of Millennials (37%) use social media, podcasts, or YouTube to keep up with the world, compared to much smaller shares of older generations (21% Generation X, 10% Baby Boomer, 7% Silent Generation). By contrast, older Americans tend to rely on broadcast news networks, like ABC, CBS, or NBC News, and Fox News.

Generational News Sources

In the last month, which of these is your main source of news about what is going on in the world? (%)



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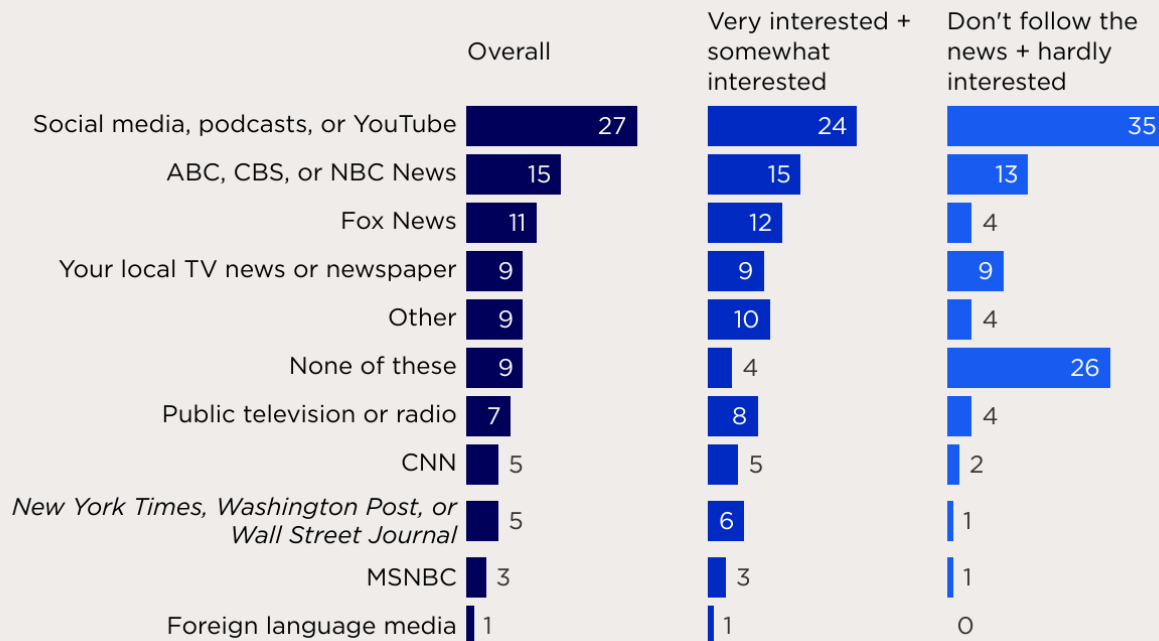


Americans who are hardly interested in news about the relations of the United States with other countries or don't follow it at all tend to learn about it from social media, podcasts, or YouTube (35%) or friends and family (26% none of these). Comparatively, those who are at least somewhat interested in international affairs tend to—when combined—get their news from more-traditional news sources, like broadcast and cable news networks, newspapers, or local media outlets.

Primary News Source across Levels of Interest in News

*In the last month, which of these is your main source of news about what is going on in the world? When you follow the news these days, how interested are you in reports about the following? **News about the relations of the United States with other countries** (%)*

■ Overall ■ Very interested + somewhat interested ■ Don't follow the news + hardly interested



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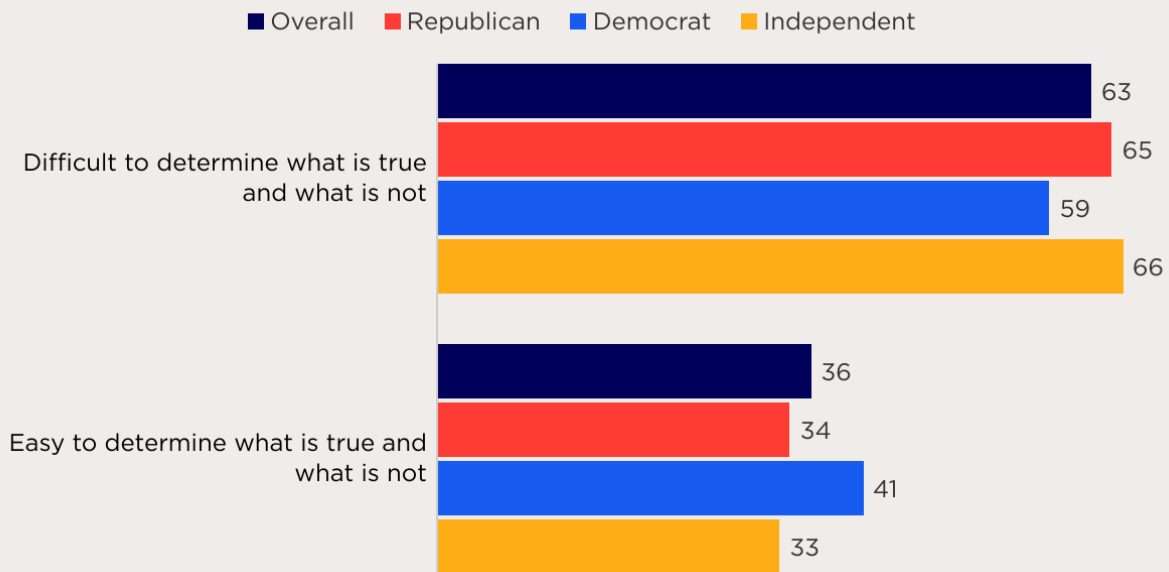
Americans across the Board Unable to Discern Truth in News and Information

At present, rapid advances in generative artificial intelligence, the spread of misinformation, and declining trust in public institutions have significantly eroded public confidence in the accuracy and credibility of information they come across.

When hearing news and information about US foreign policy in particular, the majority of Americans generally find it difficult to determine what is true and what is not (63%), while just 36 percent consider it easy to discern. Although Democrats are slightly more likely to find it easy to determine authenticity in news than Republicans or Independents, majorities across the board have trouble judging the veracity of information.

Discernment of Truth in Foreign Policy News

When you get news and information about US foreign policy, do you generally find it... (%)



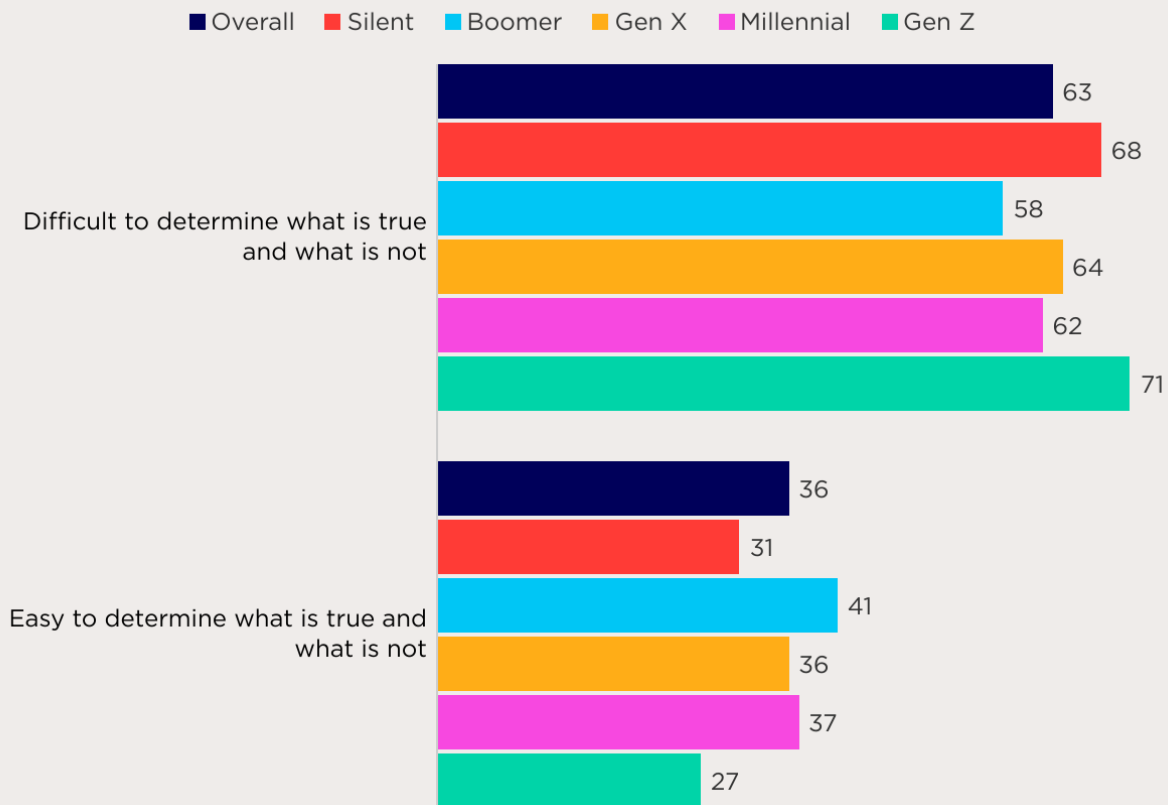
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Across the different generations of Americans, most find it difficult to discern whether news and information about US foreign policy is true or not. However, Americans from Generation Z and the Silent Generation are most likely to say they find it difficult to judge the accuracy of news.

Discernment of Truth in Foreign Policy News across Generations

When you get news and information about US foreign policy, do you generally find it... (%)



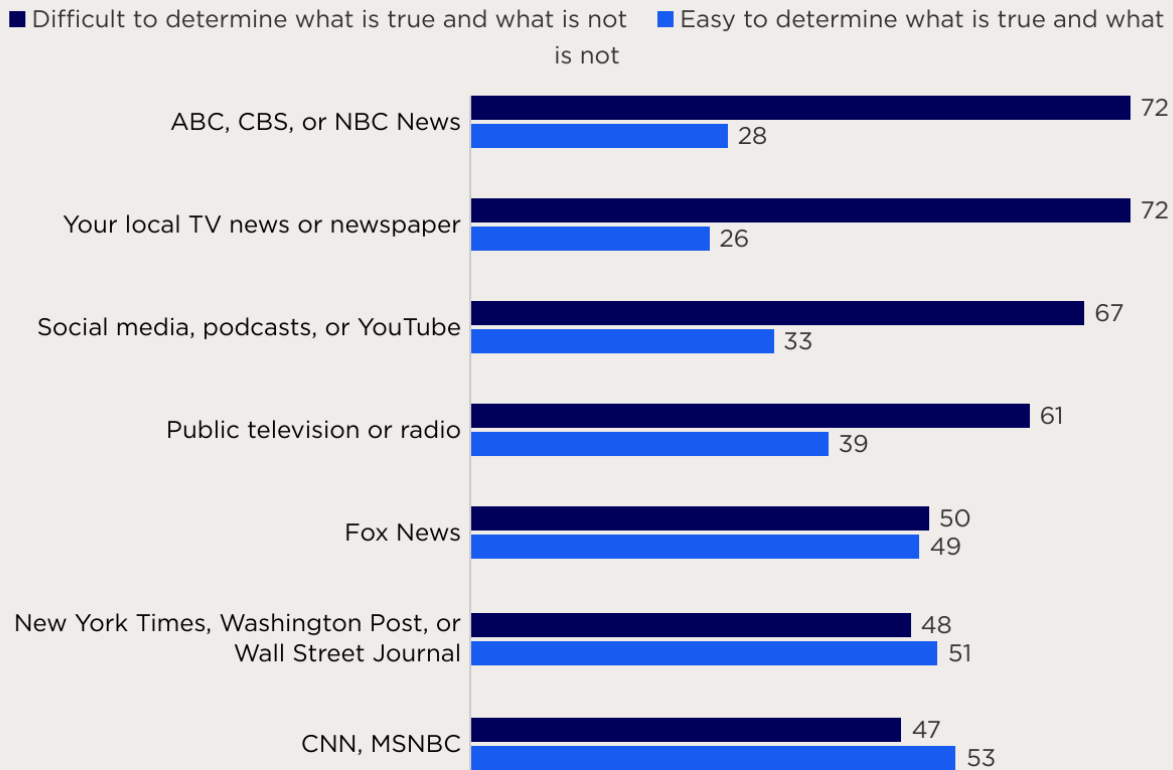
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The data show a clear difference in the ability to discern truth in news about US foreign policy based on primary news sources. Those whose primary sources of news are cable networks like CNN, MSNBC, or Fox News, and major newspapers like *the New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal* are least likely to have difficulty determining the truth in reports about US foreign policy. By contrast, viewers of broadcast networks, local news outlets, and digital media platforms are most likely to express difficulty judging information.

Discernment of Truth Based on Primary News Source

When you get news and information about US foreign policy, do you generally find it... (%)



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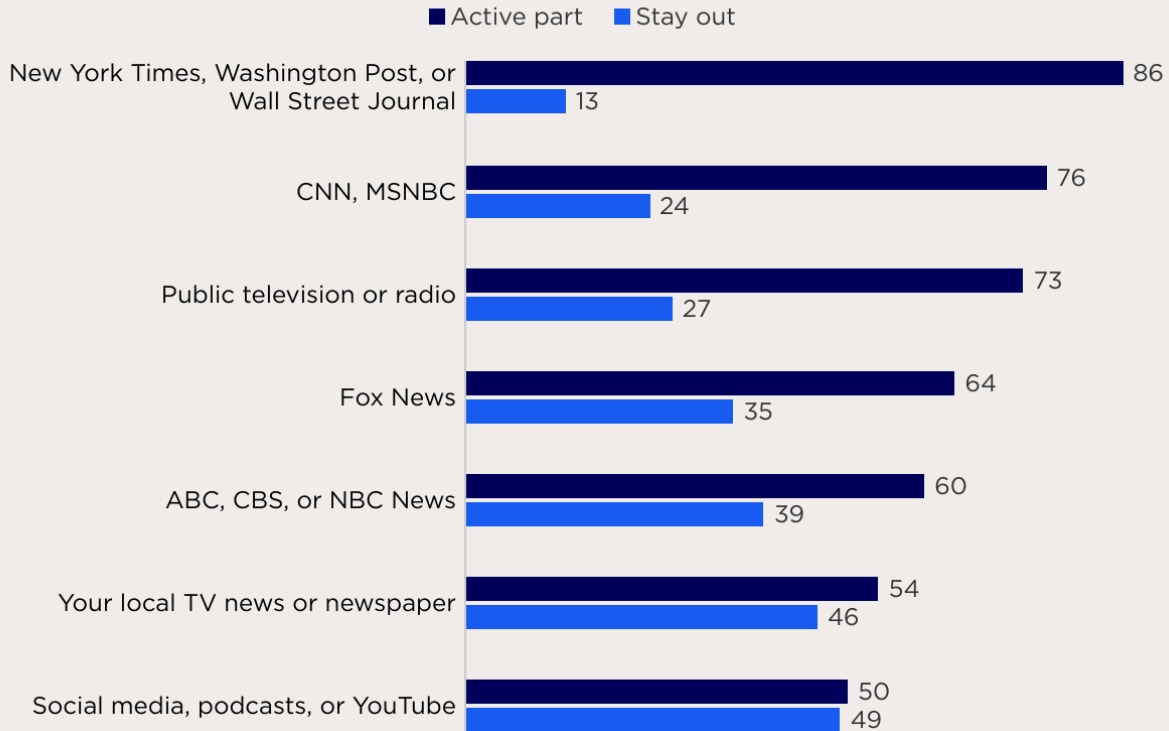


Social Media Users Tend to Question US Role in World

Data analysis shows differences in broad US foreign policy attitudes depending on Americans' primary news sources. Compared to others, those whose main sources of news are digital media platforms, like social media, podcasts, or YouTube, are least inclined to think the United States should take an active part in world affairs (50% active part vs. 49% stay out). Americans who primarily follow broadcast and cable news networks are, on the other hand, more enthusiastic advocates for playing an active role in world affairs, with more than six in 10 (60% to 76%) endorsing international engagement. Yet no audience is more confident that playing an active role in world affairs is best for the United States' future than those who get their news from major newspapers like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal* (86%).

US Role in World Based on Primary News Source

Do you think it will be best for the future of the country if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs? (%)



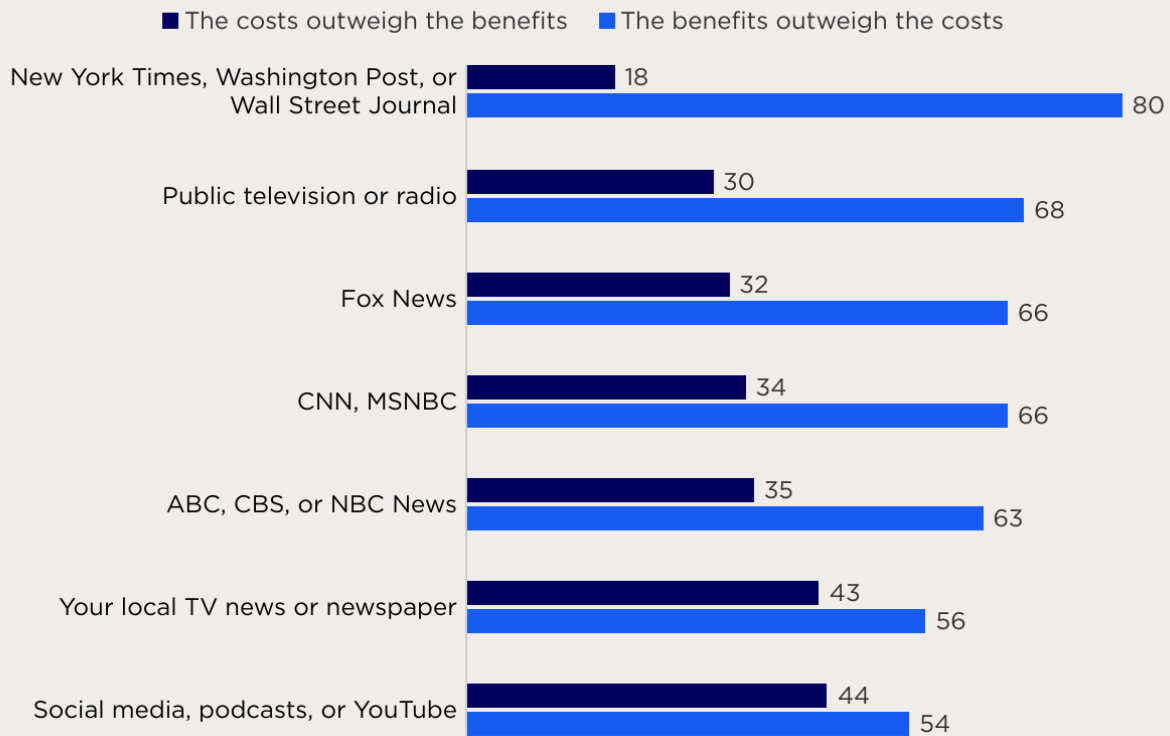
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Those who source their news from social media, podcasts, or YouTube are also more likely than others to say the costs of maintaining the US role in the world outweigh the benefits and believe the United States should reduce its involvement in world affairs because it has limited resources and its own domestic challenges. By contrast, large majorities of Americans who mainly get their news from broadcast or cable news networks are convinced of the value of maintaining the US role in the world. But like digital media users, bare majorities of ABC, CBS, or NBC News and Fox News viewers think the United States should reduce its international involvements to focus on its own domestic challenges.

Value of Maintaining US Global Role Based on Primary News Source

Overall, when it comes to maintaining the US role in the world, do you think:



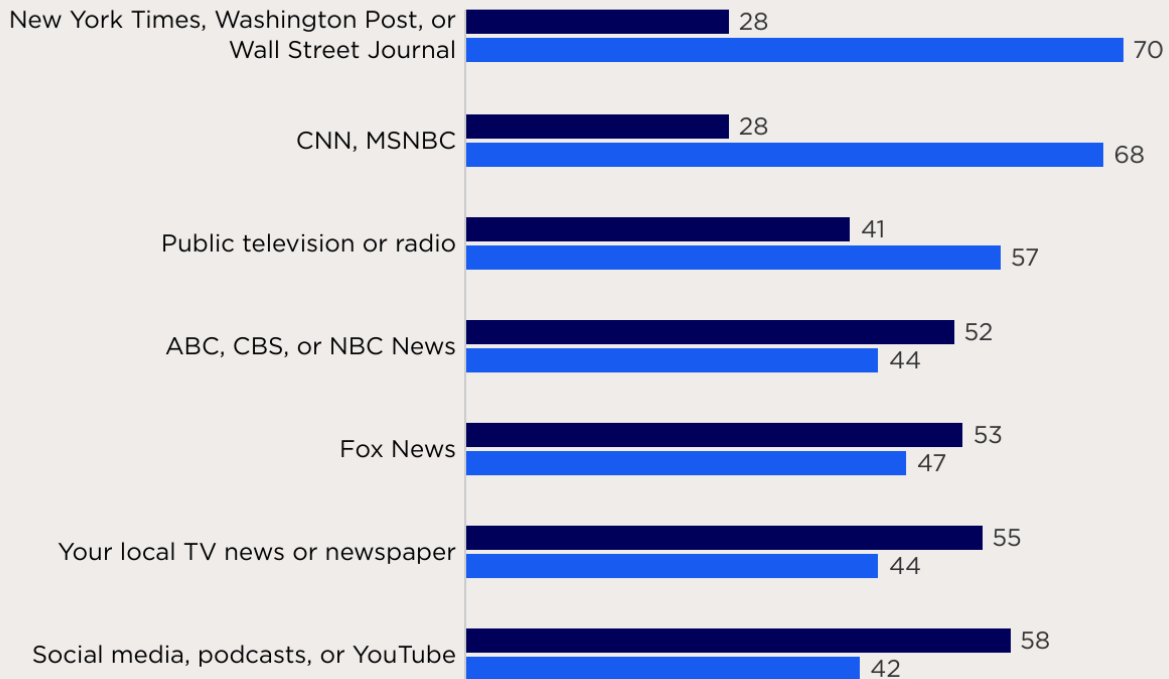
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Involvement Tradeoff Based on Primary News Source

Which of these statements comes closest to your own view? (%)

- Because the United States has both limited resources and its own domestic problems, it should reduce its involvement in world affairs.
- Because the United States has enough resources to take care of its own problems and global challenges, it should take a leading role in world affairs.



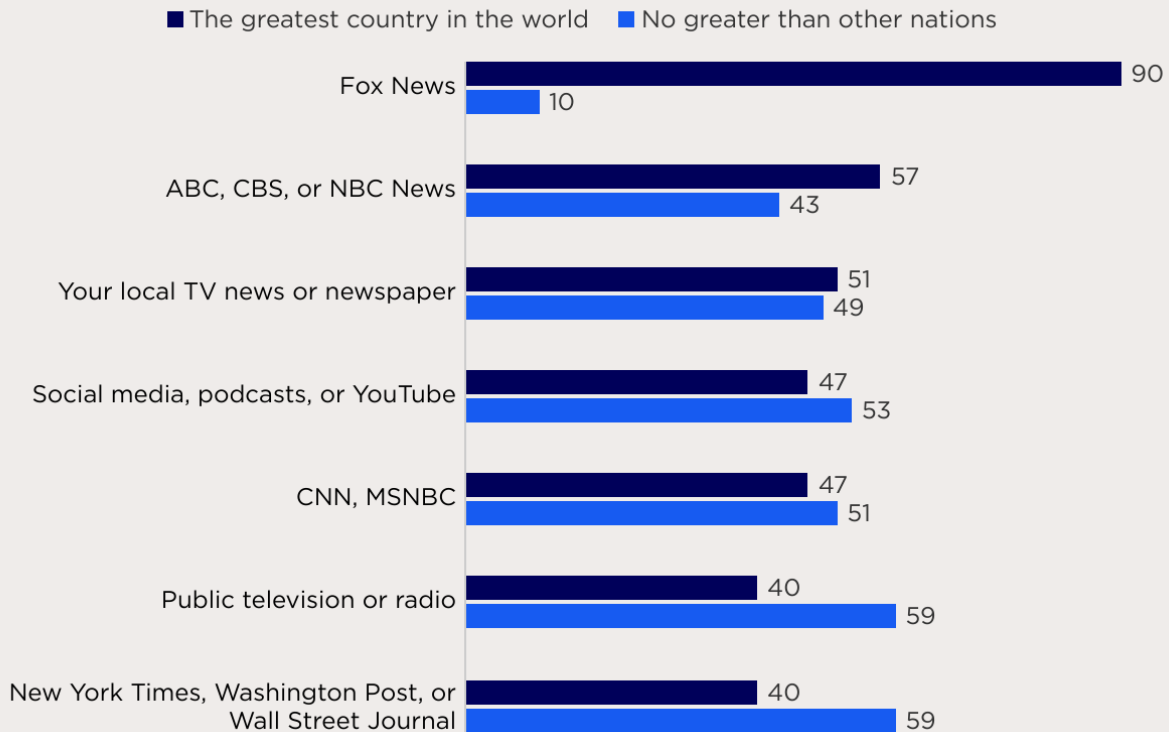
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Finally, when weighing the United States' unique character, Fox News viewers stand out in their view of American exceptionalism, as nine in 10 think the United States is the greatest country in the world. Americans who tune in to other news sources are more divided in their view—particularly digital media users and CNN or MSNBC viewers. Those who follow broadcast news networks tend to say the United States is exceptional, but not to the same degree as Fox News' audience.

View of American Exceptionalism Based on Primary News Source

Some people say the United States has a unique character that makes it the greatest country in the world. Others say that every country is unique, and the United States is no greater than other nations. Which view is closer to your own? (%)



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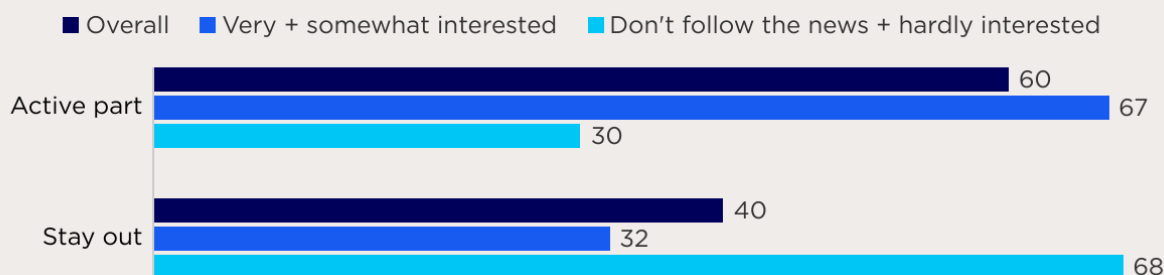
The data also show that age plays an independent role in American foreign policy attitudes. Millennials and Generation Z are more likely than those from older generations to question the US role in the world and reject the idea of American exceptionalism, regardless of their primary news source. At the same time, regardless of generational cohort, Americans have different policy attitudes based on their primary news sources. This intersection suggests both demographic factors and information ecosystems play a role in Americans' view of the world and the United States' foreign policy.

Interested Americans Express Greater Support for Active US Role in World

How does interest in news about the United States' global engagements affect American foreign policy attitudes? Well, further data analysis shows Americans who are very or somewhat interested in news about the relations of the United States with other countries are markedly more likely to say the United States should play an active role in world affairs (67%) than those who are hardly interested or don't follow the news at all (30%). In fact, the majority of those who aren't interested and don't follow the news think the United States should stay out of world affairs entirely (68%).

View of US Role in World Based on Interest in News

*Do you think it will be best for the future of the country if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs? When you follow the news these days, how interested are you in reports about the following? **News about the relations of the United States with other countries.** (%)*



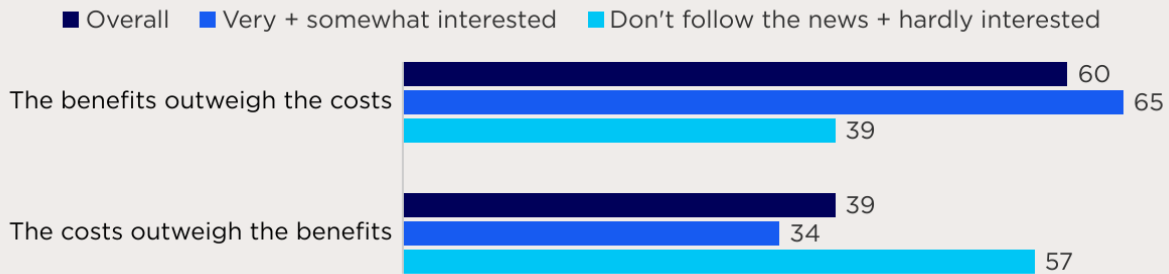
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Uninterested Americans may advocate against international engagement because they think the costs of maintaining the United States' role in the world outweigh the benefits (57%) and believe the United States has limited resources and its own domestic problems (69%). On the other hand, those interested in reports about the United States' relations with other countries tend to think the benefits of an active role in the world outweigh the costs (65%) and the United States has enough resources to take care of its own problems and take a leading role in world affairs (53%).

Value of Maintaining US Role in World Based on Interest in News

Overall, when it comes to maintaining the US role in the world, do you think...? When you follow the news these days, how interested are you in reports about the following? **News about the relations of the United States with other countries.** (%)

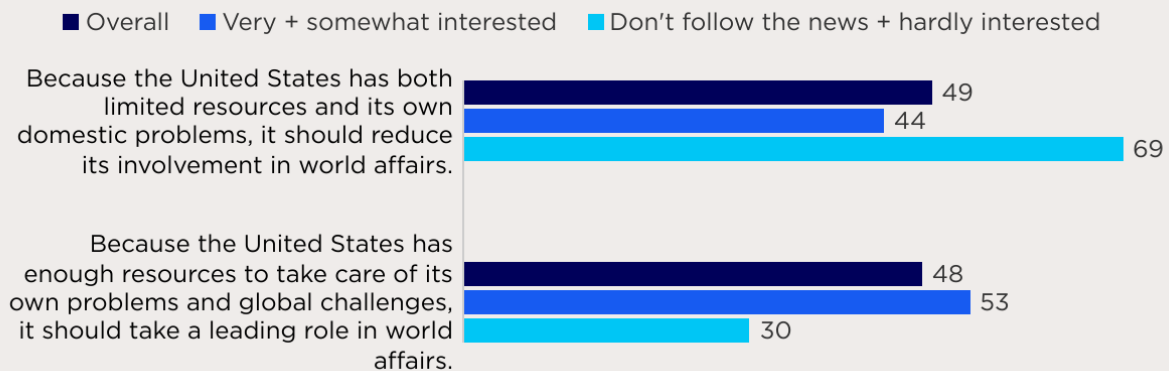


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Involvement Tradeoff Based on Interest in News

Which of these statements comes closest to your own view? When you follow the news these days, how interested are you in reports about the following? **News about the relations of the United States with other countries.** (%)



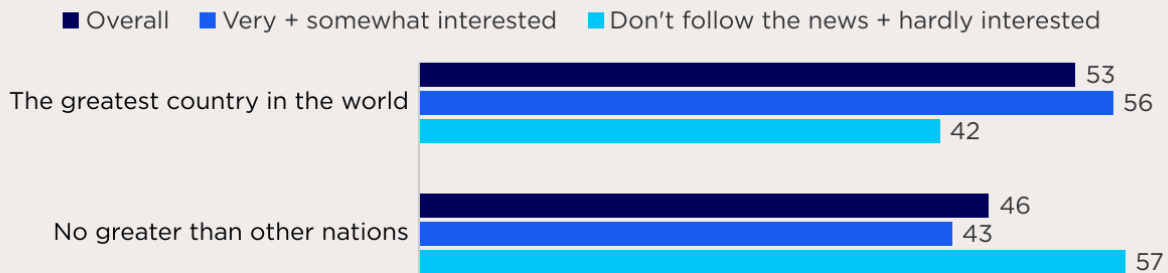
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Notably, those who do not follow the news are more likely to think the United States is no greater than other nations (57%), while an equal share of those interested in the news think the United States is the greatest country in the world.

View of American Exceptionalism Based on Interest in News

*Some people say the United States has a unique character that makes it the greatest country in the world. Others say that every country is unique, and the United States is no greater than other nations. Which view is closer to your own? When you follow the news these days, how interested are you in reports about the following? **News about the relations of the United States with other countries.** (%)*



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Conclusion

Taken together, the data show that Americans' media environments play a powerful role in shaping how they understand US foreign policy, evaluate the costs and benefits of global engagement, and perceive the accuracy of the information they encounter. Those who are interested in international news and follow it through traditional media outlets are substantially more supportive of an active US role in the world and likely to see value in global leadership. Meanwhile, Americans who rely on digital platforms—or do not follow the news at all—tend to express more skepticism about international involvement. As the information landscape continues to evolve, these divisions will have meaningful implications for public debate, policymaking, and the future of US engagement abroad.

Methodology

This analysis is primarily based on data from the 2025 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy, a project of the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy.

The 2025 Chicago Council Survey was conducted July 18–30, 2025, by Ipsos using its large-scale, nationwide, online research panel (KnowledgePanel) in English and Spanish among a weighted national sample of 2,148 adults 18 or older living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is ± 2.2 percentage points, including a design effect of 1.07.

The data for the total sample were weighted to adjust for gender by age, race/ethnicity, education, Census region, metropolitan status, and household income using demographic benchmarks from the 2024 March Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS). The specific categories used were:

- Gender (Male, Female) by Age (18–29, 30–44, 45–59 and 60+)
- Race/Hispanic Ethnicity (White Non-Hispanic, Black Non-Hispanic, Other Non-Hispanic, Hispanic, 2+ Races, Non-Hispanic)
- Education (Less than High School, High School, Some College, Bachelor or Higher)
- Census Region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)
- Metropolitan status (Metro, Non-Metro)
- Household Income (Under \$25,000, \$25,000–\$49,999, \$50,000–\$74,999, \$75,000–\$99,999, \$100,000–\$149,999, \$150,000+)

Partisan identification is based on how respondents answered a standard partisan self-identification question: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?”

The 2025 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the Crown Family and the Korea Foundation.

About the Chicago Council on Global Affairs

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs is an independent, nonpartisan membership organization that provides insight—and influences the public discourse—on critical global issues. We convene leading global voices, conduct independent research, and engage the public to explore ideas that will shape our global future. The Council is committed to bringing clarity and offering solutions to issues that transcend borders and transform how people, business, and governments engage the world. Learn more at globalaffairs.org.

About the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy

Established in 2018 with a transformative gift from the Crown Family, the Lester Crown Center on US Foreign Policy is driven by the belief that the public plays a critical role in determining the direction of US foreign policy and that an informed and engaged public is critical for effective policymaking. The centerpiece of the Lester Crown Center is its annual survey of American public opinion and US foreign policy, the Chicago Council Survey, which has been conducted since 1974.