



The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

Press Accuracy Rating Hits Two Decade Low

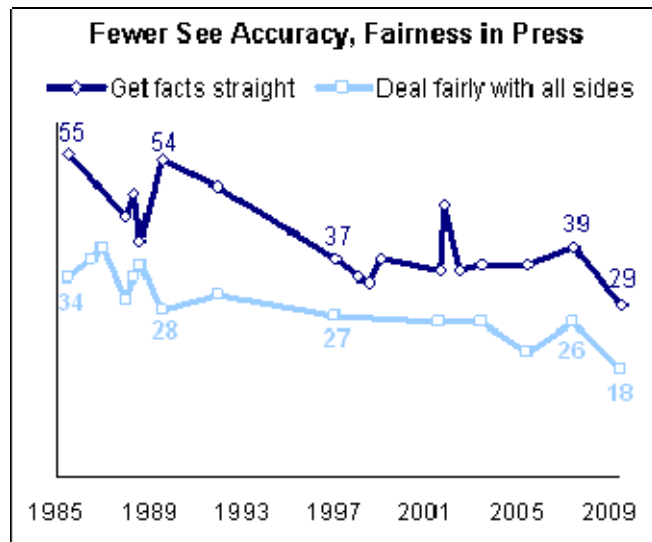
Public Evaluations of the News Media: 1985-2009

Overview

The public's assessment of the accuracy of news stories is now at its lowest level in more than two decades of Pew Research surveys, and Americans' views of media bias and independence now match previous lows.

Just 29% of Americans say that news organizations generally get the facts straight, while 63% say that news stories are often inaccurate. In the initial survey in this series about the news media's performance in 1985, 55% said news stories were accurate while 34% said they were inaccurate. That percentage had fallen sharply by the late 1990s and has remained low over the last decade.

Press Criticism Now More Bipartisan			
<i>Stories are often inaccurate</i>	July 2007	July 2009	07-09 change
Total	53	63	+10
Republicans	63	69	+6
Democrats	43	59	+16
Independents	56	53	-3
<i>R-D Gap</i>	+20	+10	
<i>Tend to favor one side</i>			
Total	66	74	+8
Republicans	81	84	+3
Democrats	54	67	+13
Independents	68	73	+5
<i>R-D Gap</i>	+27	+17	
<i>Are too critical of America</i>			
Total	43	44	+1
Republicans	63	60	-3
Democrats	23	33	+10
Independents	45	41	-4
<i>R-D Gap</i>	+40	+27	



Similarly, only about a quarter (26%) now say that news organizations are careful that their reporting is not politically biased, compared with 60% who say news organizations are politically biased. And the percentages saying that news organizations are independent of powerful people and organizations (20%) or are willing to admit their mistakes (21%) now also match all-time lows.

Republicans continue to be highly critical of the news media in nearly all respects. However, much of the growth in negative attitudes toward the news media over the last two years is driven by increasingly unfavorable evaluations by Democrats. On several measures, Democratic criticism of the news media has grown by double-digits since 2007. Today, most Democrats (59%) say that the reports of news organizations are often inaccurate; just 43% said this two years ago. Democrats are also now more likely than they were in 2007 to identify favoritism in the media: Two-thirds (67%) say the press tends to favor one side rather than to treat all sides fairly, up from 54%. And while just a third of Democrats (33%) say news organizations are “too critical of America,” that reflects a 10-point increase since 2007.

The partisan gaps in several of these opinions, which had widened considerably over the past decade, have narrowed. There are some notable exceptions to these trends, however, as Republicans increasingly see news organizations as influenced by powerful people and organizations and not professional, while Democrats’ views have changed little.

Partisan Views of Leading News Outlets					
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>	<i>R-D</i> <i>Gap</i>
	%	%	%	%	
CNN					
Favorable	60	44	75	55	-31
Unfavorable	19	34	7	22	+27
DK/Can't rate	21	22	18	23	
Fox News					
Favorable	55	72	43	55	+29
Unfavorable	25	13	36	24	-23
DK/Can't rate	20	15	21	21	
MSNBC					
Favorable	48	34	60	47	-26
Unfavorable	19	35	7	20	+28
DK/Can't rate	33	31	32	33	
Network TV					
Favorable	64	55	81	54	-26
Unfavorable	24	35	9	33	+26
DK/Can't rate	12	10	10	12	
New York Times					
Favorable	29	16	39	29	-23
Unfavorable	17	31	8	18	+23
DK/Can't rate	54	53	53	54	
NPR					
Favorable	44	39	50	43	-11
Unfavorable	12	13	7	16	+6
DK/Can't rate	44	48	43	40	
Wall St. Journal					
Favorable	32	39	29	32	+10
Unfavorable	13	12	16	12	-4
DK/Can't rate	55	49	56	56	

Figures read down.

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press’ biennial media attitudes survey, conducted July 22-26 among 1,506 adults reached on landlines and cell phones, finds that even as the party gaps in several criticisms of the press have lessened over the past few years, views of many individual media sources are deeply divided along party lines.

Democrats hold considerably more positive views than Republicans of CNN, MSNBC, The New York Times and the news operations of the broadcast networks, and their views of National Public Radio are somewhat more favorable than those of Republicans. By contrast, views of Fox News -- and to a lesser extent The Wall Street Journal -- are more positive among Republicans than Democrats.

Partisan differences in views of Fox News have increased substantially since 2007. Today, a large majority of Republicans view Fox News positively (72%), compared with just 43% of Democrats. In 2007, 73% of Republicans and 61% of Democrats viewed Fox News favorably. Three-quarters (75%) of Democrats assess CNN favorably, while just 44% of Republicans do so, which is little changed from two years ago. MSNBC also rates substantially higher among Democrats (60%) than among Republicans (34%).

But the starkest partisan division is seen in assessments of The New York Times. Although most Americans are not familiar enough with the Times to express an opinion, Republicans view The New York Times negatively by a margin of nearly two-to-one (31% to 16%), while Democrats view it positively by an almost five-to-one margin (39% to 8%). More independents rate the Times favorably (29%) than unfavorably (18%).

More favorable Republican ratings are reserved for The Wall Street Journal. Within the GOP, the balance of favorable to unfavorable assessments of the Journal is second only to that for Fox News. Democratic and independent assessments of The Wall Street Journal are also, on balance, positive. And the balance of opinion regarding National Public Radio is favorable across the board; however, Democratic opinions of NPR are somewhat more positive than those of Republicans (50% favorable vs. 39%).

TV Is Dominant Source for National and Local News		
<i>Where do you get most of your...</i>		
	National/ int'l news	Local news
	%	%
Television	71	64
Internet	42	17
Newspapers	33	41
Radio	21	18

Figures add to more than 100% because of multiple responses.

The poll finds that television remains the dominant news source for the public, with 71% saying they get most of their national and international news from television. More than four-in-ten (42%) say they get most of their news on these subjects from the internet, compared with 33% who cite newspapers. Last December, for the first time in a Pew Research Center survey, more people said they got most of their national and international news from the internet than said newspapers were their main source.

However, online news lags behind newspapers as a source for news about local issues. As with national and international news, most people (64%) cite television as their main source for local news. Yet despite declines in newspaper readership over the last several years, about four-in-ten people (41%) turn to newspapers for news about issues and events in their local area, more than twice the number that turn to the internet for local news (17%).

Who Does the Most to Uncover Local Stories?	
	%
Local TV stations	44
Local newspapers	25
News websites	11
Local radio stations	10
Multiple/DK	9
	100

Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

The public's impressions of which news organizations do the most to uncover local news stories largely mirror the top sources for local news. More than four-in-ten (44%) say that local television stations do the most to uncover and report on important local issues, while a quarter (25%) identify local newspapers as the primary sources of local news reporting. Far fewer people identify local independent online organizations (11%) or radio stations (10%) as responsible for uncovering most local news stories. Even among those who get most of their local news from newspapers, about as many say most original local reporting is done by television stations (41%) as by newspapers (38%).