



# Texas Election 2020

## Information Sources & Perceptions of Media Bias

**HOBBY**  
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

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# Research Team

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# Introduction

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The Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston conducted an online survey among likely Texas voters to identify leading candidates in the 2020 election and to examine opinions about voting during a pandemic and media bias in political reporting. The survey was fielded in English and Spanish between October 13 and October 20 with 1,000 YouGov respondents, resulting in a confidence interval of +/-3.1%. The results of this survey have been presented in three separate reports. The first report focused on vote intention as well as favorability ratings and confirmation of the next U.S. Supreme Court Justice. The second report concentrated on the 2020 voting experience in Texas and potential elections reforms. This report examines on the sources that voters rely on for information about candidates and election and explores attitudes about media bias among Texas voters. All of these reports are found at [uh.edu/hobby/election2020](https://uh.edu/hobby/election2020).

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## Sources of Information on Candidates and Elections

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Respondents were asked to what extent they relied on eight different sources for information about the 2020 candidates and elections. The four response options were as follows: A Lot, Some, A Little, Not At All.

Table 1 displays the distribution of responses for eight different sources: newspapers (online or print), radio, network & cable TV news, local TV news, candidate campaign websites, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

**Table 1:** Reliance on Different Sources for Information About Candidates & Elections

Source	A Lot	Some	A Little	Not At All
Network & Cable TV News	24.9	29.2	20.6	25.3
Local TV News	18.3	29.6	19.1	33.1
Radio	12.7	24.4	15.9	47.0
Newspaper (online or print)	10.5	22.5	18.4	48.6
YouTube	8.8	17.6	14.2	59.4
Candidate Campaign Websites	8.6	17.0	19.2	55.2
Twitter	8.5	12.3	9.8	69.4
Facebook	7.1	18.1	15.5	59.3

The most common sources, those that are relied on the most by likely Texas voters either “A Lot” or “Some”, are network & cable TV news (54.1%) and local TV news (47.9%). The least common sources, those that the most likely Texas voters report they do not rely on at all, are Twitter (69.4%), YouTube (59.4%), and Facebook (59.3%). In other words, between three-fifths and two-thirds of likely Texas voters are not relying at all on social media for information on candidates and elections this year.

Table 2 breaks down the reliance on the different sources based on the respondent’s generation. Texas voters belong to one of five generational groups: Silent Generation

(those born before 1946), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Millennials (1981-1996), Generation Z (1997-2012). In the analysis, the members of the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers (45.0% of the survey population) are examined together as are the Millennials and members of Generation Z (31.3%), while members of Generation X (23.8%) are examined separately.

**Table 2:** Generation and Candidate and Election Information Sources

Source	Generation	A Lot	Some	A Little	Not At All
Newspaper (online or print)	Silent/Boomers	8.1	20.5	16.3	55.1
	Generation X	10.0	28.3	19.5	42.3
	Millenials/Generation Z	14.4	21.0	20.6	44.0
Radio	Silent/Boomers	13.7	25.8	15.6	44.9
	Generation X	15.7	29.8	15.4	39.0
	Millenials/Generation Z	8.8	18.3	16.9	56.1
Network & Cable TV News	Silent/Boomers	30.3	32.6	18.2	18.9
	Generation X	25.9	29.8	18.2	26.2
	Millenials/Generation Z	16.5	23.9	25.7	33.8
Local TV News	Silent/Boomers	20.0	30.9	20.1	28.9
	Generation X	16.5	28.9	18.7	35.9
	Millenials/Generation Z	17.1	28.1	18.0	36.8
Candidate Campaign Websites	Silent/Boomers	6.5	13.3	20.6	59.7
	Generation X	5.0	20.2	17.8	56.9
	Millenials/Generation Z	14.4	19.8	18.2	47.5
Facebook	Silent/Boomers	6.0	14.1	13.7	66.3
	Generation X	7.5	16.0	16.8	59.7
	Millenials/Generation Z	8.5	25.3	17.0	49.1
Twitter	Silent/Boomers	3.6	6.0	4.8	85.6
	Generation X	5.2	14.8	12.1	68.0
	Millenials/Generation Z	18.0	19.5	15.3	47.2
YouTube	Silent/Boomers	3.1	11.8	11.8	73.4
	Generation X	6.6	17.9	15.9	59.6
	Millenials/Generation Z	18.6	25.8	16.3	39.2

There exist relatively few highly salient generational differences in terms of reliance for information on the 2020 elections and candidates. The most salient differences are found in the medium of social media. Millennials and members of Generation Z are significantly more likely than Baby Boomers and members of the Silent Generation to rely “A Lot” on Twitter (18.0% vs. 3.6%) and YouTube (18.6% vs. 3.1%), while Baby Boomers and members of the Silent Generation are significantly more likely than Millennials and members of Generation Z to rely “Not At All” on Twitter (85.6%



vs. 47.2%) and YouTube (73.4% vs. 39.2%). Other differences revolve around the reliance on network & cable TV news, which 62.9% of the Silent Generation and Boomers rely on “A Lot” or “Some” compared to only 40.4% of Generation Z and Millennials. One in three (33.8%) of the members of the latter generational group report that they rely on network & cable TV news “Not At All”, compared to only 18.9% of the Silent Generation and Boomers.

Table 3 breaks down the reliance on the different sources based on the respondent’s partisan identification. The likely Texas voters surveyed are distributed relatively evenly across the three main party identification categories: Republican (32.6%), Democrat (31.6%), Independent (31.9%). The remaining 3.9% of respondents were split among those who identify with another party and those who are unsure about their party identification.

**Table 3:** Partisan Identification and Candidate and Election Information Sources

Source	Partisan Identification	A Lot	Some	A Little	Not At All
Newspaper (online or print)	Democrat	17.1	27.9	22.4	32.6
	Independent	9.2	21.7	17.8	51.3
	Republican	5.6	19.2	16.2	59.0
Radio	Democrat	8.0	24.8	14.8	52.4
	Independent	9.9	24.7	19.1	46.3
	Republican	17.3	25.1	15.2	42.3
Network & Cable TV News	Democrat	35.0	30.3	19.6	15.0
	Independent	18.8	27.7	24.8	28.8
	Republican	23.0	30.9	17.4	28.8
Local TV News	Democrat	33.5	30.1	17.6	18.9
	Independent	11.6	30.2	23.0	35.2
	Republican	11.2	30.4	17.7	40.8
Candidate Campaign Websites	Democrat	9.2	19.0	20.7	51.1
	Independent	6.8	16.6	19.3	57.3
	Republican	10.0	16.4	17.4	56.2
Facebook	Democrat	11.6	18.8	14.3	55.3
	Independent	4.9	16.4	14.5	64.2
	Republican	5.5	20.4	16.3	57.7
Twitter	Democrat	14.3	15.0	11.6	59.1
	Independent	7.5	13.6	10.9	68.1
	Republican	4.3	8.4	6.6	80.7
YouTube	Democrat	8.0	21.7	13.8	56.5
	Independent	12.3	14.2	14.2	59.4
	Republican	6.8	16.3	14.5	62.4

There are relatively few highly salient partisan differences in terms of preferences for information sources on the 2020 elections and candidates. Some differences that are however especially noteworthy are that Republicans are significantly more likely than Democrats to say they rely “Not At All” on newspapers (59.0% vs. 32.6%), local TV news (40.8% vs. 18.9%), and Twitter (80.7% vs. 59.1%). Conversely, Democrats are significantly more likely than Republicans to rely “A Lot” on local TV news (33.5% vs. 11.2%).

Table 4 breaks down the reliance on the different sources based on the respondent’s race/ethnicity. In regard to self-identified ethnicity/race, the likely Texas voters are distributed as follows: Anglo (58.1%), Latino (23.4%), African American (13.1%), Other (5.4%).

**Table 4:** Race/Ethnicity and Candidate and Election Information Sources

Source	Race/Ethnicity	A Lot	Some	A Little	Not At All
Newspaper (online or print)	Anglo	9.1	20.6	16.4	53.8
	Latino	12.7	25.1	21.3	40.9
	African American	13.8	23.5	20.7	41.9
Radio	Anglo	14.6	23.1	13.5	48.9
	Latino	9.3	25.6	21.6	43.5
	African American	6.5	28.3	18.0	47.3
Network & Cable	Anglo	21.6	29.5	21.7	27.3
	Latino	25.4	25.4	20.9	28.2
TV News	African American	38.2	39.3	11.6	11.0
Local TV News	Anglo	11.2	27.3	19.5	42.0
	Latino	24.5	32.1	20.3	23.2
	African American	41.1	29.7	18.4	10.8
Candidate Campaign Websites	Anglo	7.6	17.3	18.3	56.8
	Latino	10.9	16.0	24.0	49.2
	African American	10.8	16.6	18.4	54.2
Facebook	Anglo	5.9	17.7	15.3	61.2
	Latino	8.1	22.3	18.0	51.7
	African American	9.7	14.8	11.4	64.2
Twitter	Anglo	6.9	9.3	10.3	73.5
	Latino	7.5	18.9	13.0	60.7
	African American	18.8	15.3	5.8	60.0
YouTube	Anglo	7.0	14.3	12.2	66.5
	Latino	11.0	20.5	21.6	46.9
	African American	14.4	18.7	10.5	56.4

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There also are relatively few highly salient racial/ethnic differences in terms of reliance for information on the 2020 elections and candidates. The most salient difference is related to the reliance on the local TV news by African Americans and Anglos. African Americans are significantly more likely than Anglos to rely “A Lot” on the local TV news (41.1% vs. 11.2%) while Anglos are significantly more likely than African Americans to rely “Not At All” on the local TV news (42.0% vs. 10.8%) and on network & cable TV news (27.3% to 11.0%). Anglos also are significantly more likely than Latinos to rely “Not At All” on YouTube (66.5% vs. 46.9%).



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## Perceptions of Media Bias

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In the survey the respondents were asked if they believed that specific media outlets have a strong liberal bias, a slight liberal bias, a slight conservative bias, a strong conservative bias, or if they believed that the media outlet was neutral and objective. Respondents also had the option of answering that they did not know enough about the outlet to have an opinion. The media outlets included are CNN, Fox News, National Public Radio (NPR), the New York Times, the Texas Tribune, the Wall Street Journal, and their local newspaper. For the local newspaper, the respondents were provided with the name of their local newspaper based on the zip code of their home residence.

Table 5 details the distribution of the respondents for these eight media outlets. More than half of likely Texas voters perceive CNN (66.6%) and the New York Times (55.0%) as having a liberal bias (strong or slight), while more than half (63.5%) perceive Fox News as having a conservative bias (strong or slight). More than a fifth of the likely voters don't know enough about the New York Times (20.9%), Wall Street Journal (24.2%), their local newspaper (26.5%), National Public Radio (28.1%) or the Texas Tribune (53.5%) to have an opinion about the outlet.

**Table 5:** Public Opinion on Media Bias Among Likely Texas Voters

Media Outlet	Strong Liberal Bias	Slight Liberal Bias	Neutral And Objective	Slight Conservative Bias	Strong Conservative Bias	Don't Know Enough
CNN	49.1	17.5	16.7	3.2	3.3	10.1
New York Times	40.4	14.6	18.2	3.8	2.1	20.9
National Public Radio	26.4	12.1	25.8	4.7	3.0	28.1
Local Newspaper	17.3	17.0	24.4	10.3	4.6	26.5
Wall Street Journal	16.7	16.9	23.2	14.4	4.7	24.2
Fox News	6.0	9.1	13.5	22.6	40.9	7.9
Texas Tribune	5.9	10.8	17.2	7.2	5.5	53.5

National Public Radio (25.8%) is viewed as neutral and objective by the highest proportion of likely Texas voters, followed closely by the local newspapers (24.4%)

and the Wall Street Journal (23.2%). Fox News (13.5%) and CNN (16.7%) are viewed as neutral and objective by the smallest proportion of Texas likely voters.

**Figure 1:** Proportion of Texas Voters Who Perceive Media Outlet as Having a Strong Liberal Bias

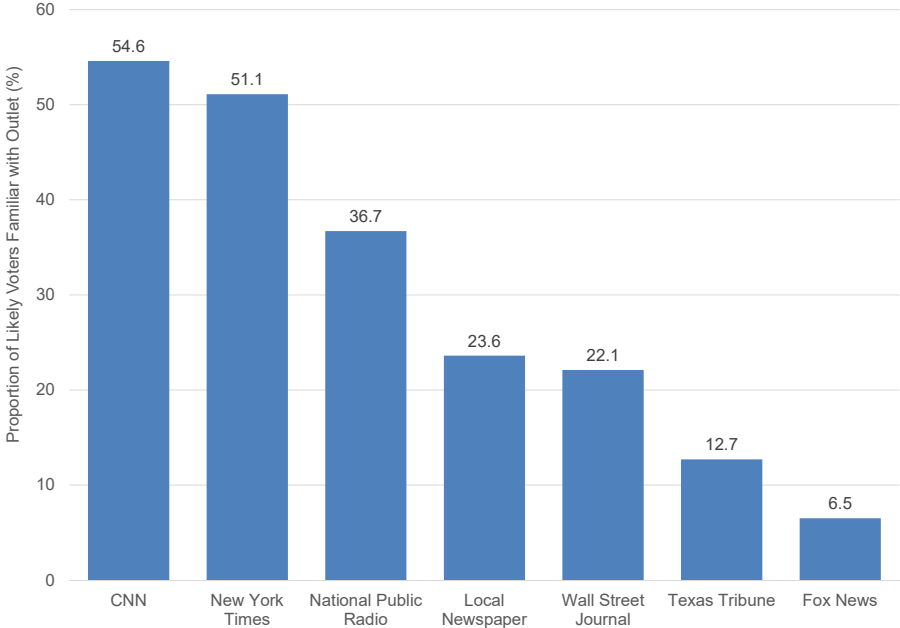


Figure 1 displays the proportion of likely Texas voters familiar with the media outlet who perceive it as having a strong liberal bias. The proportions range from highs of 54.6% and 51.1% for CNN and the New York Times to lows of 12.7% and 6.5% for the Texas Tribune and Fox News.

**Figure 2:** Proportion of Texas Voters Who Perceive Media Outlet as Having a Strong Conservative Bias

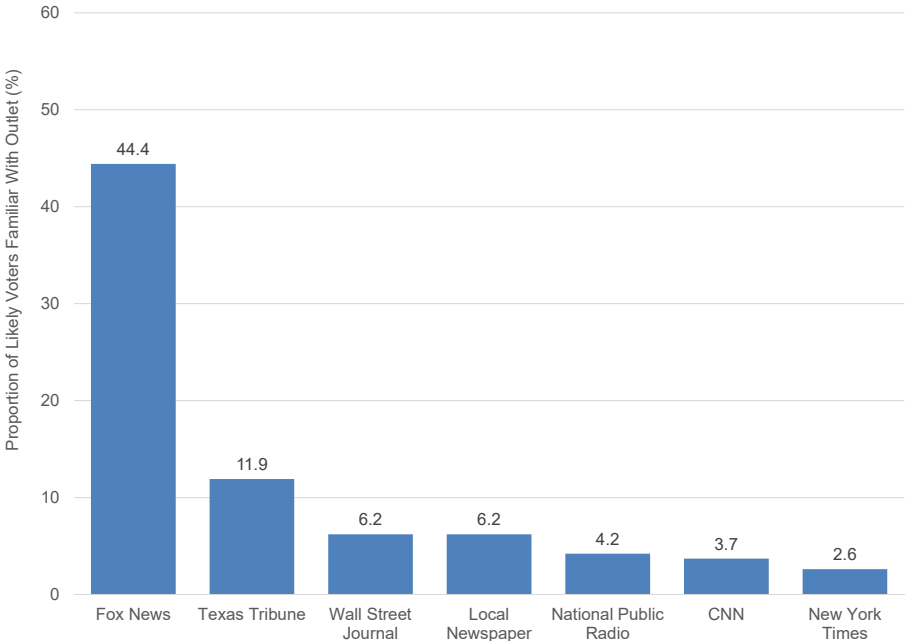


Figure 2 displays the proportion of likely Texas voters familiar with the media outlet who perceive it as having a strong conservative bias. Fox News at 44.4% is in a league of its own in this category, with among the other outlets only the Texas Tribune reaching the double digits, albeit barely, at 11.9%.

**Figure 3:** Proportion of Texas Voters Who Perceive the Media Outlet as Neutral & Objective

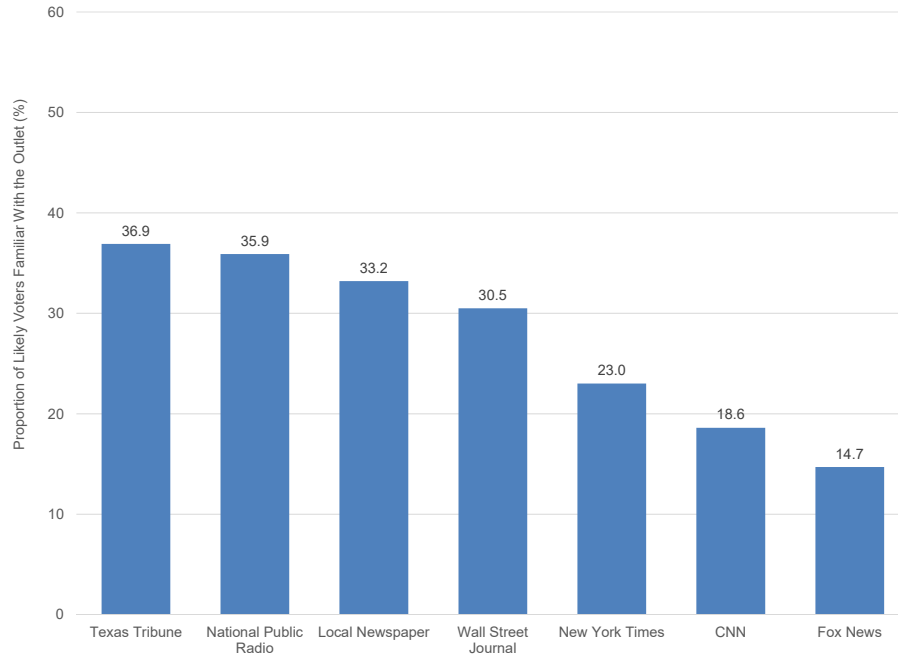


Figure 3 displays the proportion of likely Texas voters familiar with the media outlet who perceive it as neutral and objective. The proportions range from highs of 36.9%, 35.9%, and 33.2% for the Texas Tribune, National Public Radio, and the local newspapers, to lows of 23.0%, 18.6%, and 14.7% respectively for the New York Times, CNN, and Fox News.