



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Study finds social media now a leading news source for Montanans

Latest Greater Montana Foundation study finds:

- **Montanans are increasingly consuming news as a passive experience.**
- **Social media matches traditional media as a source for news.**
- **Montanans' trusted sources of news differ by political identity.**
- **Montanans find local news important.**

May 28, 2026 — Helena, Mont. — A new study released by the Greater Montana Foundation, the organization dedicated to encouraging communication on the issues, trends and values important to Montanans, reveals startling new trends in Montanans' attention to news and how they consume news and information.

According to the 2025-2026 Sources of News Survey, commissioned by GMF and conducted by the University of Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Montanans' attention to news is decreasing, becoming a more passive experience. And age and political party affiliation are increasingly determinant factors in which news sources are consumed and trusted.

The statewide, random-sample survey was conducted in the winter of 2025-2026 and follows the 2015, 2016 and 2019 GMF Sources of News surveys. This new survey, the first in the post-COVID era, asked Montana adults about their news consumption habits, trusted news sources and issues of importance. The survey has a sampling error rate of +/- 6%.

“While the study shows that local news remains important to Montanans, more people are now receiving news through social and digital platforms where information is delivered to them rather than actively sought,” said Nicole McCleskey, partner at Public Opinion Strategies, a national public opinion research firm that provided analytical assistance for the GMF study. “As algorithms increasingly shape what people see, news consumption can become more passive and reinforce echo chambers that limit exposure to differing perspectives and sources of information.”

The study finds that Montanans are increasingly consuming news as a passive experience, with 67% of adults saying they are more likely to “read or listen to the news that is delivered to you” as compared to 33% who “search out news that interests you.” Adults with a high school education are more likely to be passive news

consumers, with 82% listening or reading news that is delivered to them, compared to 56% of those with a college degree.

The survey also reports that Montanans' attention to current events has steadily dropped since 2015, with those who follow the news "very closely" dropping from 23% in 2015 to 19% in 2025-2026. Attention to news is eroding most significantly among younger adults, with 51% of Montanans ages 18 – 34 saying they follow the news "very" or "somewhat" closely, compared to 85% of adults age 65 and older.

When asked if they use social media as a news source, 71% of Montanans said they use social media to access news and information, compared to 47% in 2019 and 34% in 2015.

Use of social media as a source of local news now matches local television and newspaper consumption and exceeds radio. Local news continues to be at least somewhat important to Montanans, with 82% of the respondents saying that they find local news "absolutely," "mostly" or "somewhat" important.

Partisan preferences in news consumption and trustworthiness divided survey respondents. When asked what specific news source they trust most, Republican respondent sources included a mix of local and national news sources, including Montana Television Network (CBS), Google, NBC Montana, FoxNews.com and Nonstop Local (ABC/Fox). Democrat respondents' trusted news sources included NYTimes.com, Bozeman Chronicle, CNN.com, MS NOW (formerly MSNBC) and Google.

"Montanans continue to value local news, but this study highlights how dramatically the ways people access and engage with news have changed over the last decade," said Ed Johnson, chair of the Greater Montana Foundation Board of Trustees. "These findings underscore the importance of informed civic dialogue and seeking trusted journalism from a variety of sources at a time when news consumption is increasingly shaped by digital platforms, political polarization and passive information habits."

The study also asked Montanans about issues of importance. When asked which "one issue" respondents think is most important to Montana, inflation and the cost of living was by far the top concern for Montanans at 27%. Other top issues include (in order of importance) the environment, health care, weather or natural disasters, and jobs and the economy.

About the Greater Montana Foundation

Founded in 1958 by visionary pioneer broadcaster, entrepreneur and philanthropist Ed Craney, the Greater Montana Foundation aims to benefit the people of Montana by encouraging communication on the issues, trends and values important to present and future generations of Montanans. Through its grant program, GMF provides support to a broad range of television, radio and documentary film initiatives. GMF has been a longtime sponsor of Montana PBS and Montana Public Radio programming. Results from this survey will be used to provide focus areas for GMF grantmaking in the future. greatermontana.org

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Media note: You'll find additional findings and survey methodology on the separate Fact Sheet included with this press release. A detailed set of results, with cross tabulations, is available by request and will be posted on greatermontana.org and on the UM Bureau of Business and Economic Research's website, bber.umt.edu.



FACT SHEET - May 28, 2026

2025-2026 Sources of News Survey key findings, insights and trends

Montanans’ news consumption habits

More Montanans today are consuming news delivered to them, rather than seeking out the news. Montanans are following the news less closely overall.

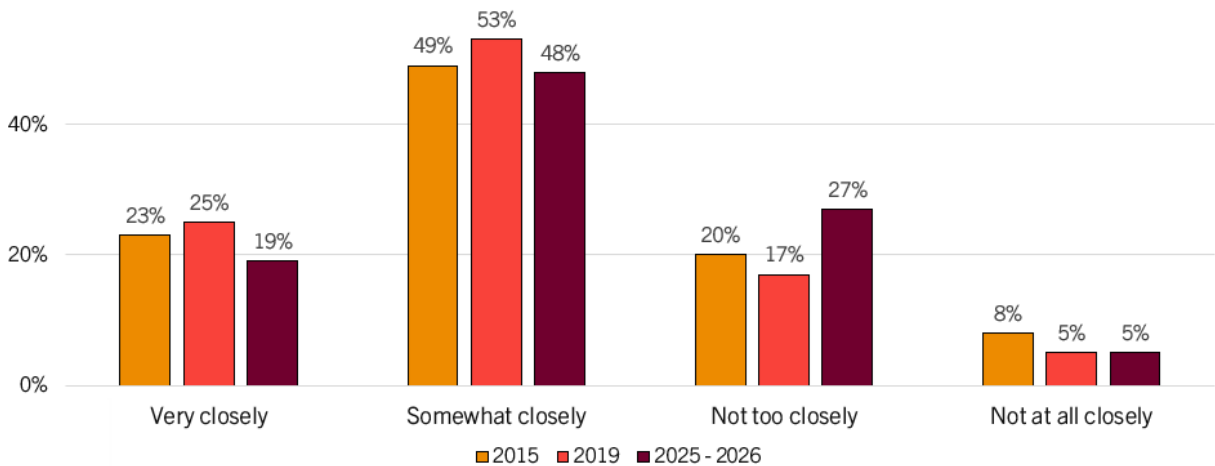
67% read or listen to news delivered to them | 33% search out news that interest them

News consumption by demographics:

News consumption method	HS diploma or less	Some college or AA degree	Bachelor degree or more	Less than \$50,000	\$50,000 - \$99,999	\$100,000 - \$199,999	\$200,000 +
Searches out news that interests them	18%	39%	44%	24%	9%	47%	70%
Reads or listens to news that is delivered to them	82%	61%	56%	76%	91%	53%	30%

News consumption method	Urban	Rural	Democrat	Independent	Republican
Searches out news that interests them	29%	44%	31%	55%	28%
Reads or listens to news that is delivered to them	71%	56%	69%	45%	72%

How closely Montanans follow current events in the news:



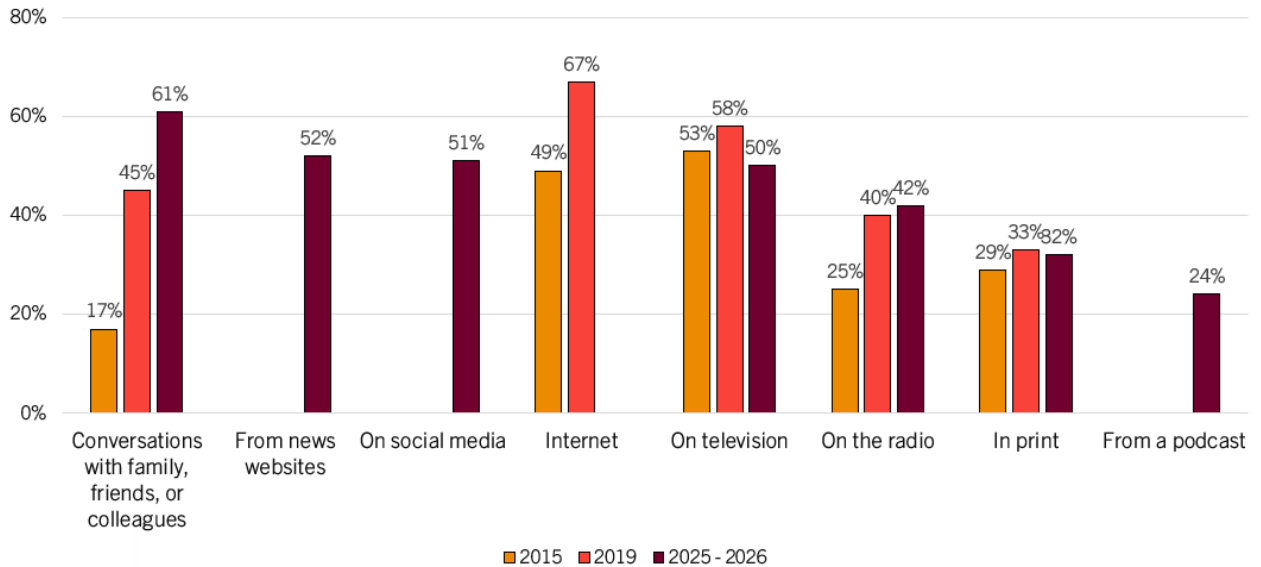
Where Montanans get their news

Digital and social media are top news sources, with more Montanans now getting their local news from social media than traditional media sources. Getting news through conversations with friends and family exceeds all other sources. Trusted news sources vary by party affiliation.

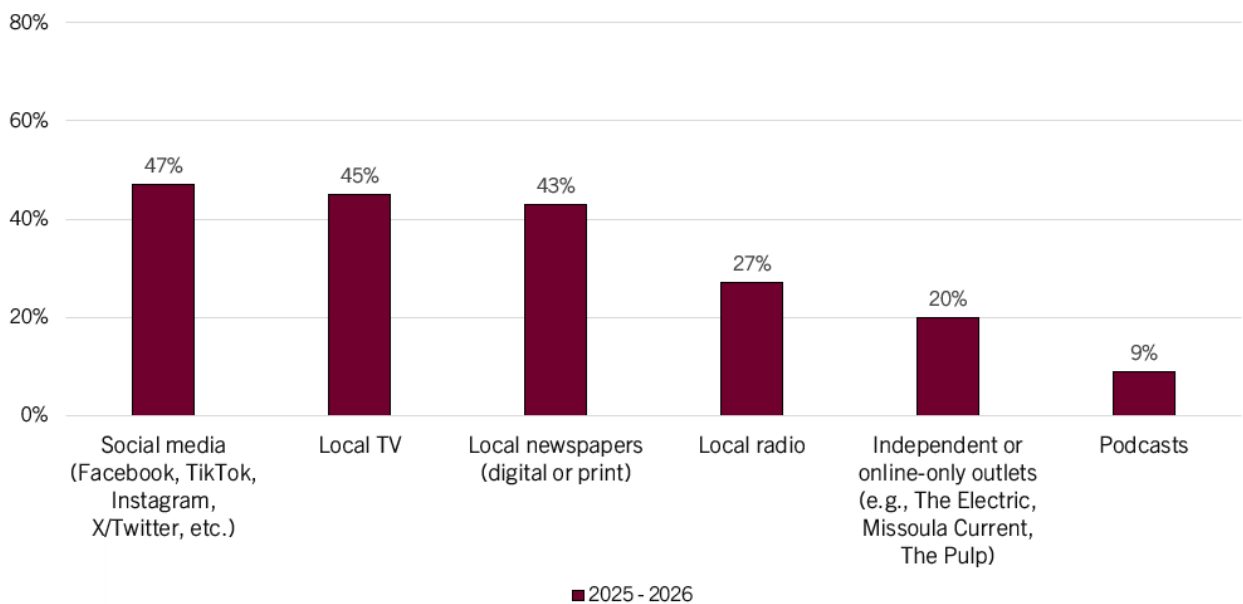
Percentage of Montanans who use social media to access news and information:

71% in 2025-2026 | 47% in 2019 | 34% in 2015

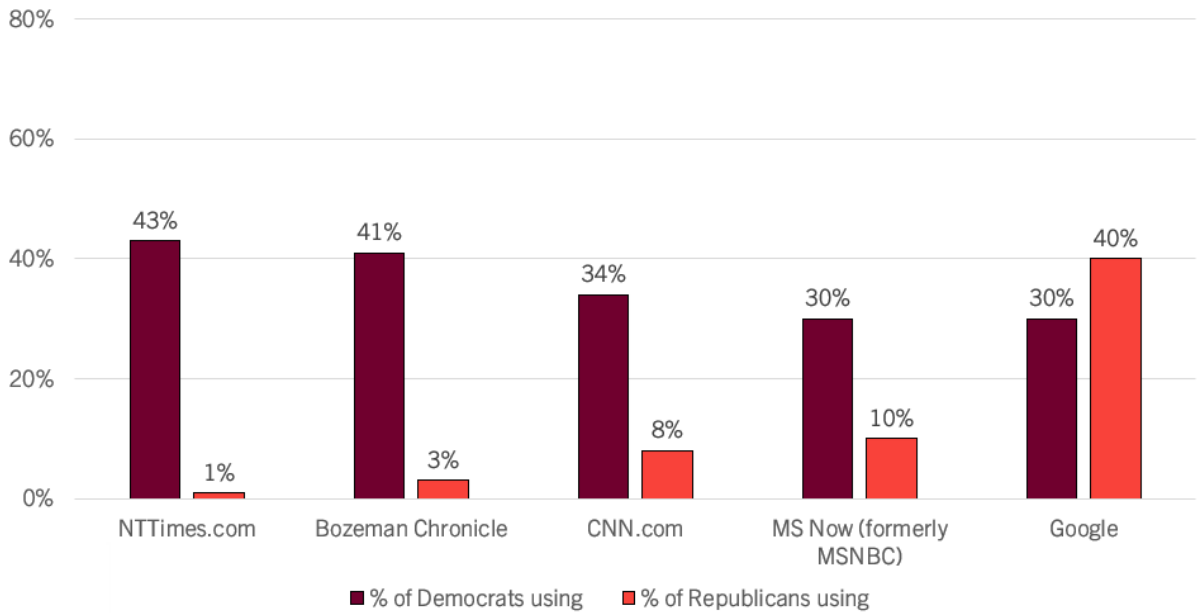
How Montanans get their news:



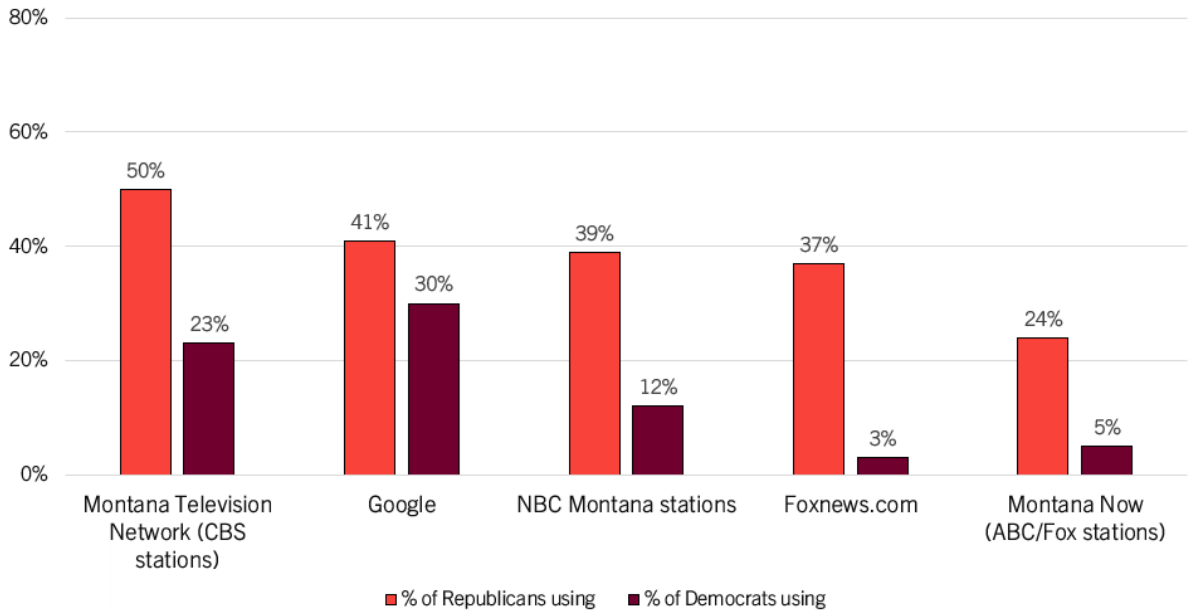
Where Montanans get their local news and information:



Democrat sources of internet news:



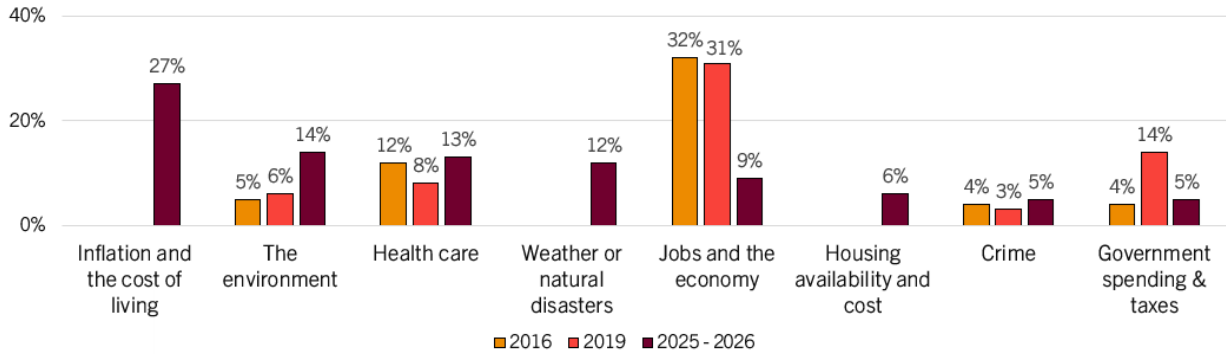
Republican sources of internet news:



Issues of importance to Montanans

The issues important to Montanans have shifted in the post-COVID era. Inflation and the cost of living, the environment, and housing availability and cost were added to the survey for the first time in 2025-2026.

Which ONE issue is the most important in the state:



Issues of importance by demographics:

Issue	Male 18-49	Male 50+	Female 18-49	Female 50+
Inflation and the cost of living	30%	29%	27%	22%
The environment	10%	21%	11%	20%
Health care	9%	8%	10%	26%
Weather or natural disasters	1%	11%	*	4%
Jobs and the economy	11%	13%	0%	15%
Housing availability and cost	5%	1%	14%	1%

Issue	Urban	Rural	Democrat	Independent	Republican
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Methodology: *The 2025-2026 Sources of News Survey was commissioned by the Greater Montana Foundation and conducted and analyzed by the University of Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research with analytical assistance from Public Opinion Strategies, a national public opinion research firm. BBER used leading-edge random, address-based sampling of adult Montana residents, with responses collected by mail and internet. A total of 406 adults completed the survey between November 2025 and February 2026. The results have a sampling error rate of +/- 6%. Other sources, such as question wording and reporting inaccuracies, may contribute additional error. The survey estimates are weighted by sex, age, education, tenure and Montana 2024 presidential election voting data from the U.S. Census Bureau and Montana Secretary of State. Survey estimates for subgroups should be interpreted with care as they are based on fewer respondents. Full question wording may be obtained from John Baldrige of UM BBER: john.baldrige@umontana.edu.*



2025 - 2026
SOURCES OF
NEWS SURVEY

Summary presentation

Methods summary

- Sponsored by the Greater Montana Foundation
- Random, address-based sample of 1,624 adult Montana residents
- Administered November 2025 - February 2026 by mail, responses collected by mail and the internet
- 406 completions, response rate 25% (AAPOR 2023, RR 3)
- Margin of error +/- 6%
- Other sources, like question wording and reporting inaccuracy, may contribute additional error

Methods summary - continued

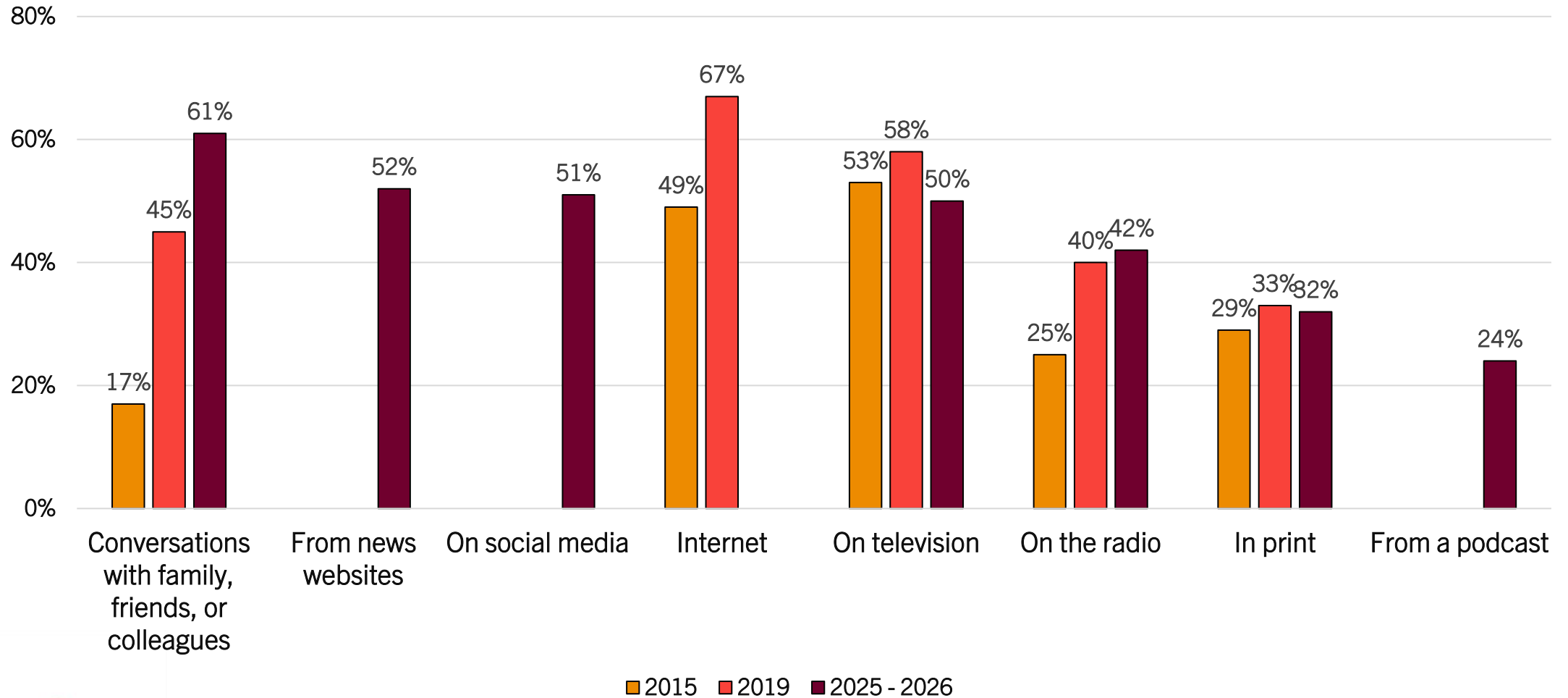
- Weighted by sex, age, education, tenure, and 2024 Presidential election vote using data from U.S. Census Bureau and the Montana Secretary of State
- Sample purchased from Dynata, Inc.
- Administered by UM BBER with questionnaire and analytical assistance from Nicole McCleskey of Public Opinion Strategies
- Survey estimates for subgroups should be interpreted with care since they are based on fewer respondents
- Full question wording may be obtained from John Baldrige of UM BBER: john.baldrige@umontana.edu

Results

- The rise of social media
- Passive news consumption
- News silos, echo chambers, and news fatigue
- Most important issues
- Local news remains important in Montana

The rise of social media

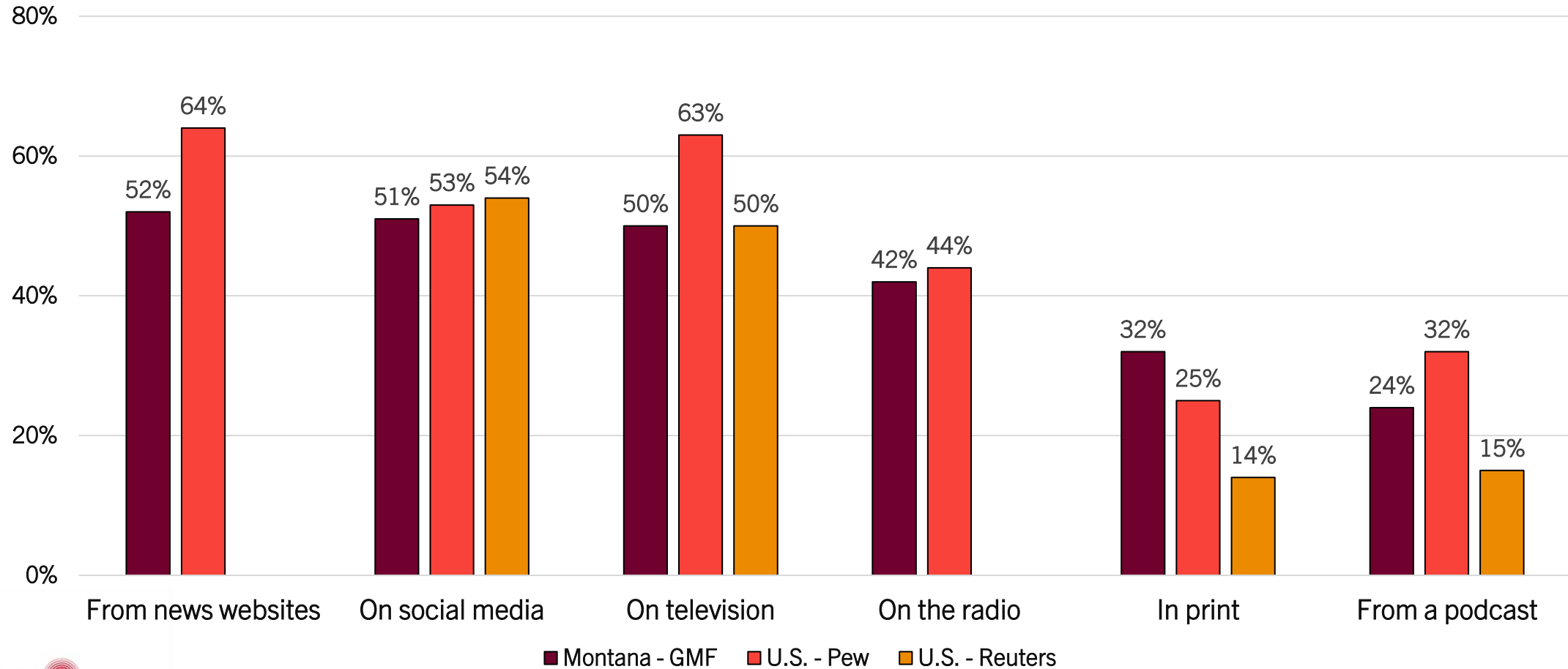
How did you get your news in the past week?



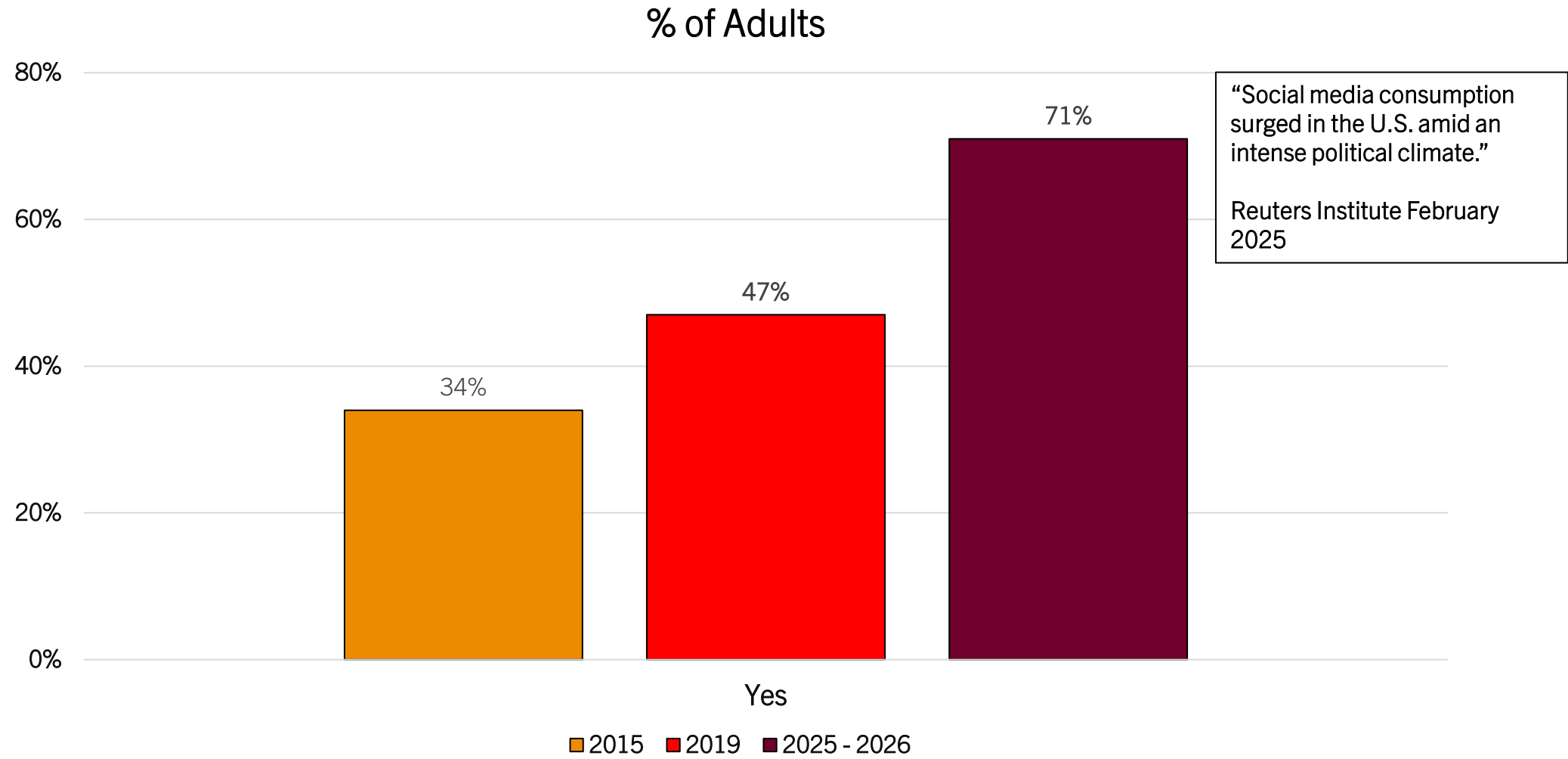
Montana compared to the U.S.

Pew Research Center Aug. 2025 and Reuters Institute Feb. 2025

How did you get your news?

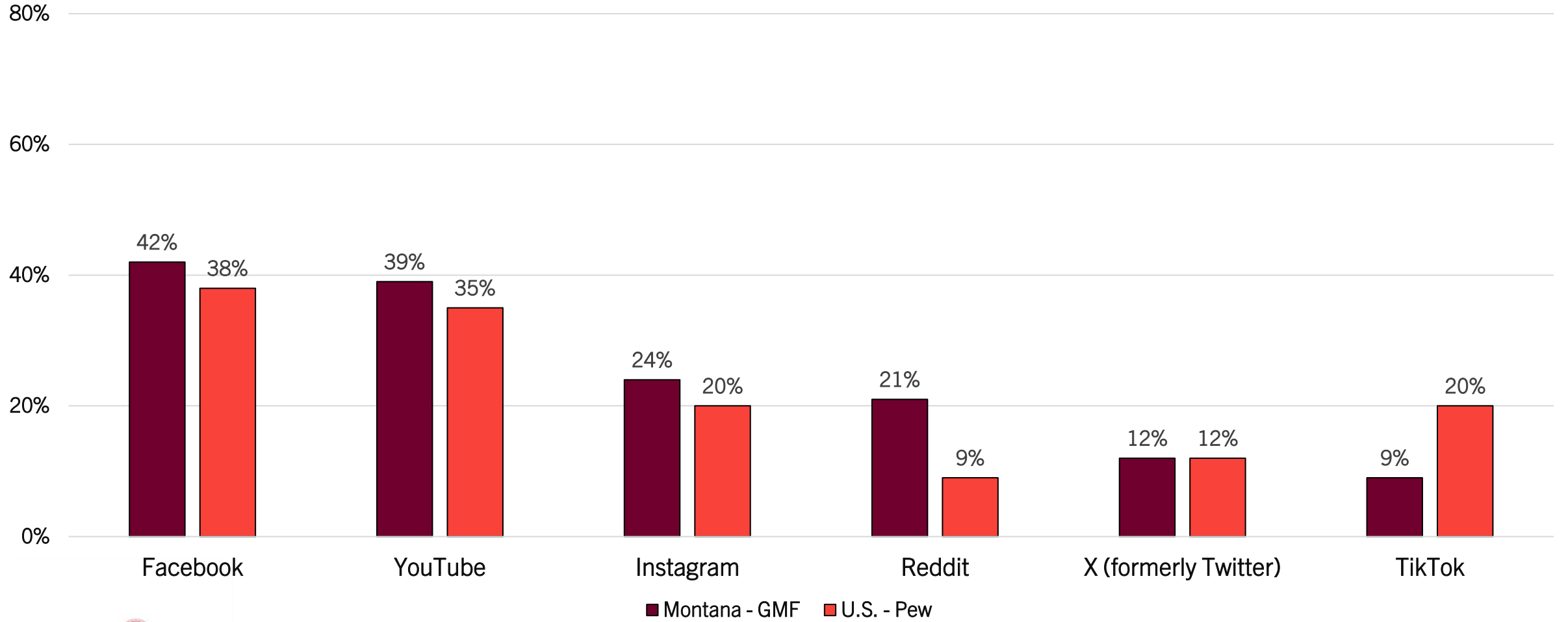


Uses social media to access news or information



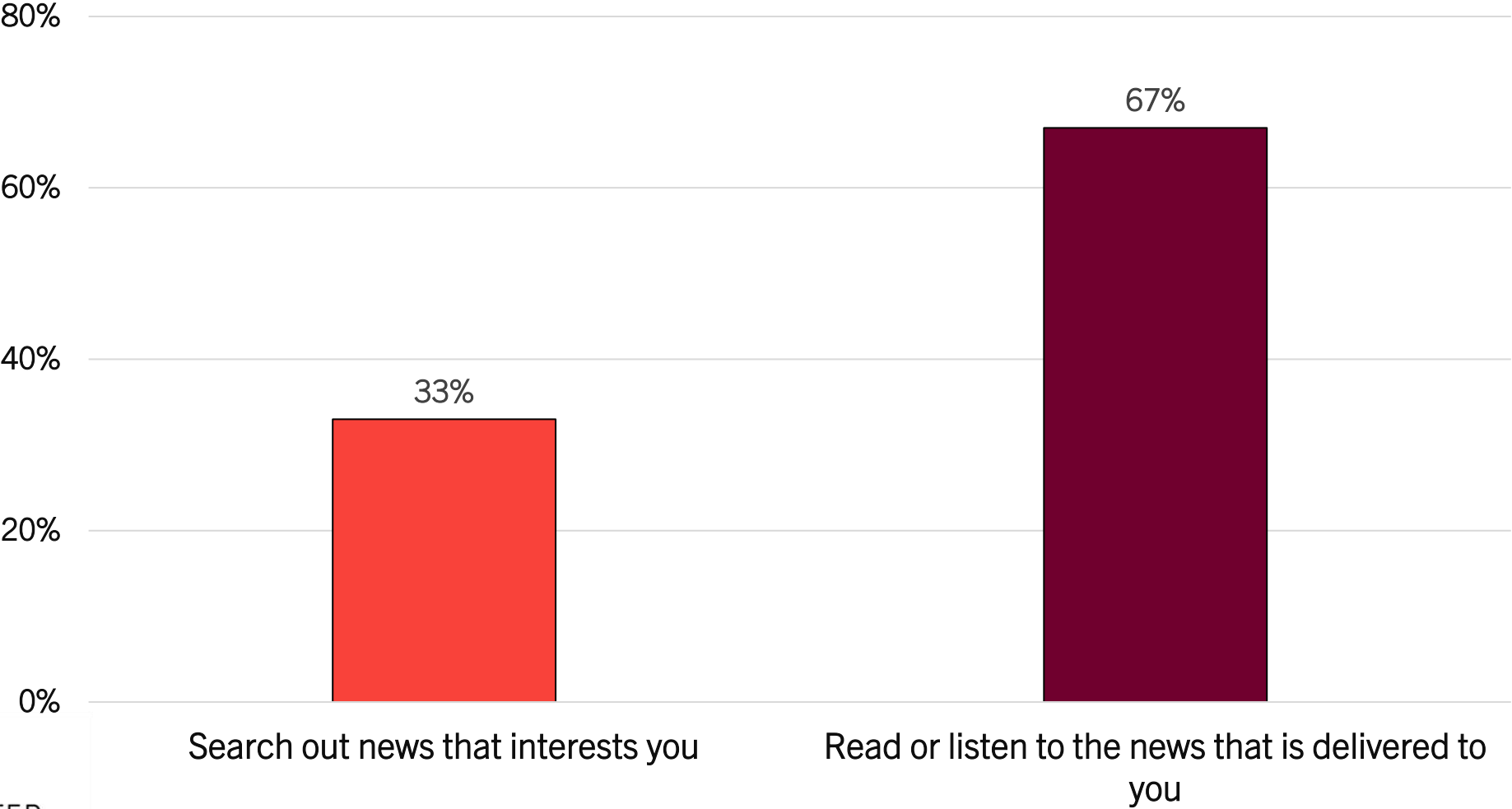
Montana compared to the U.S. – Pew Research Center August 2025

% Who get news on this site



Passive news consumption

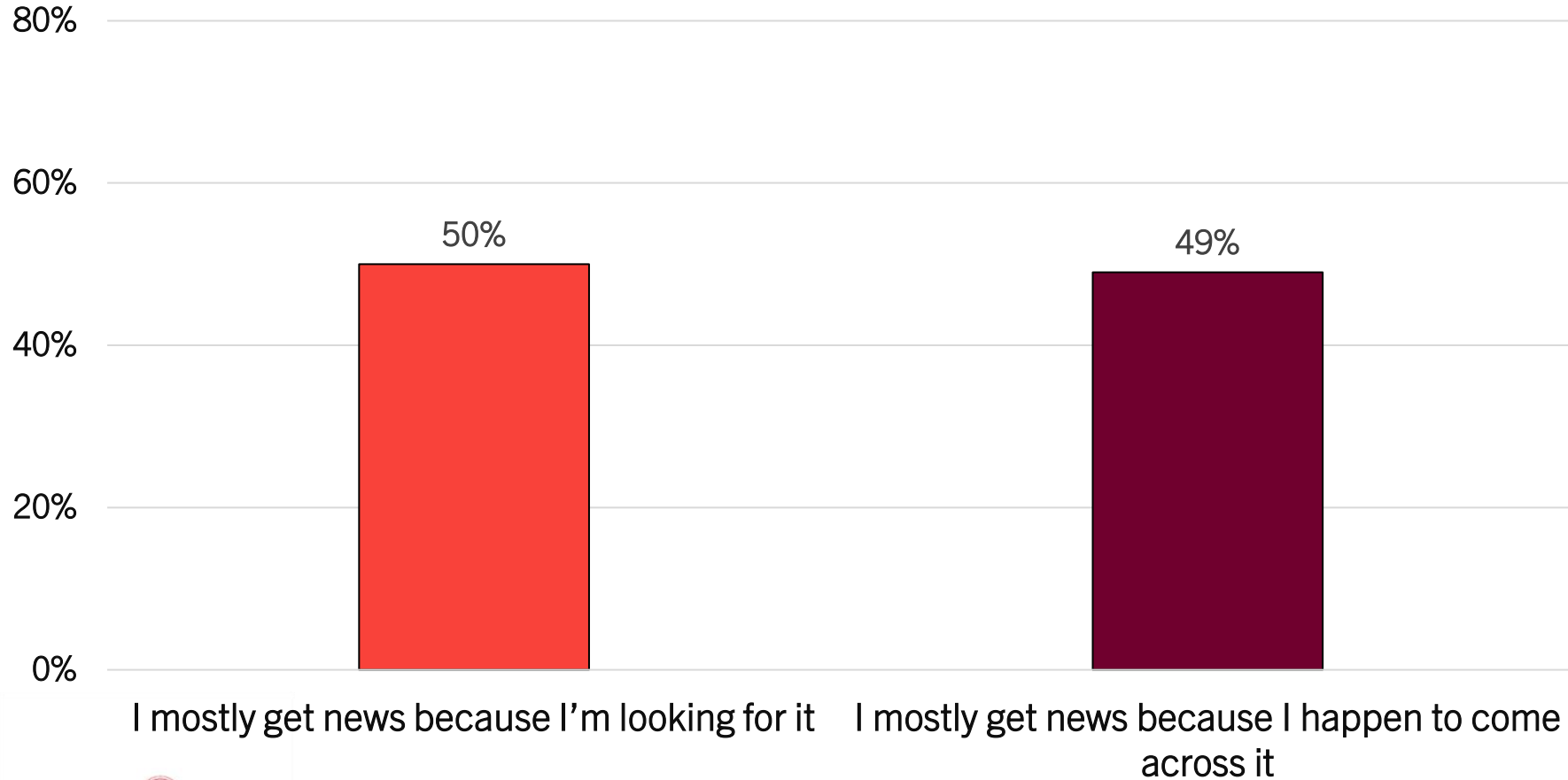
Do you most often?



Different question from Pew Research Center

U.S. adults December 2025

Which statement best describes how you get news?



Quotes from Pew respondents:

“News finds you nowadays,” a man in his 40s.

“Even when you’re not pursuing it, something’s being put in front of you,” a woman in her 20s.

Passive news consumption by education attainment and household income

News consumption method	HS diploma or less	Some college or AA degree	Bachelor degree or more	Less than \$50,000	\$50,000 - \$99,999	\$100,000 - \$199,999	\$200,000 +
Searches out news that interests them	18%	39%	44%	24%	9%	47%	70%
Reads or listens to news that is delivered to them	82%	61%	56%	76%	91%	53%	30%

Passive news consumption by urban - rural and political party identification

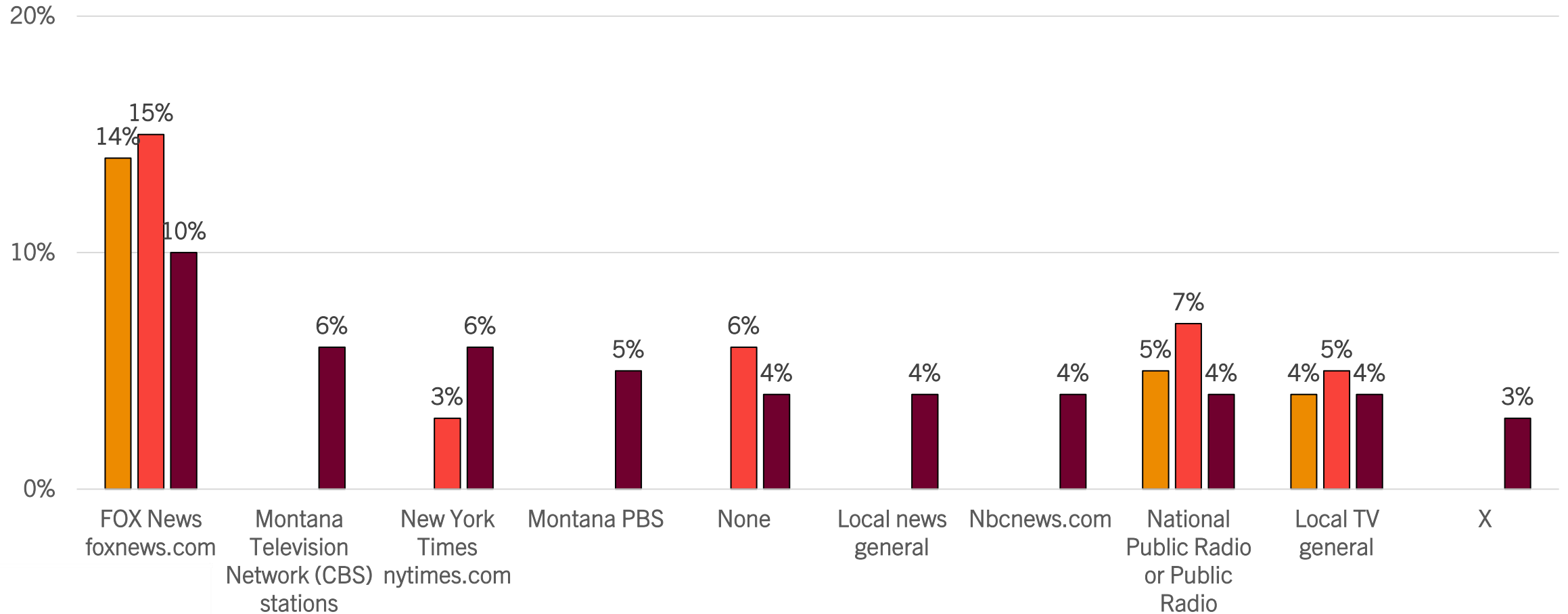
News consumption method	Urban	Rural	Democrat	Independent	Republican
Searches out news that interests them	29%	44%	31%	55%	28%
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Urban = Cascade, Flathead, Gallatin, Lewis and Clark, Missoula, Silver Bow, and Yellowstone counties.
Rural = all other counties.

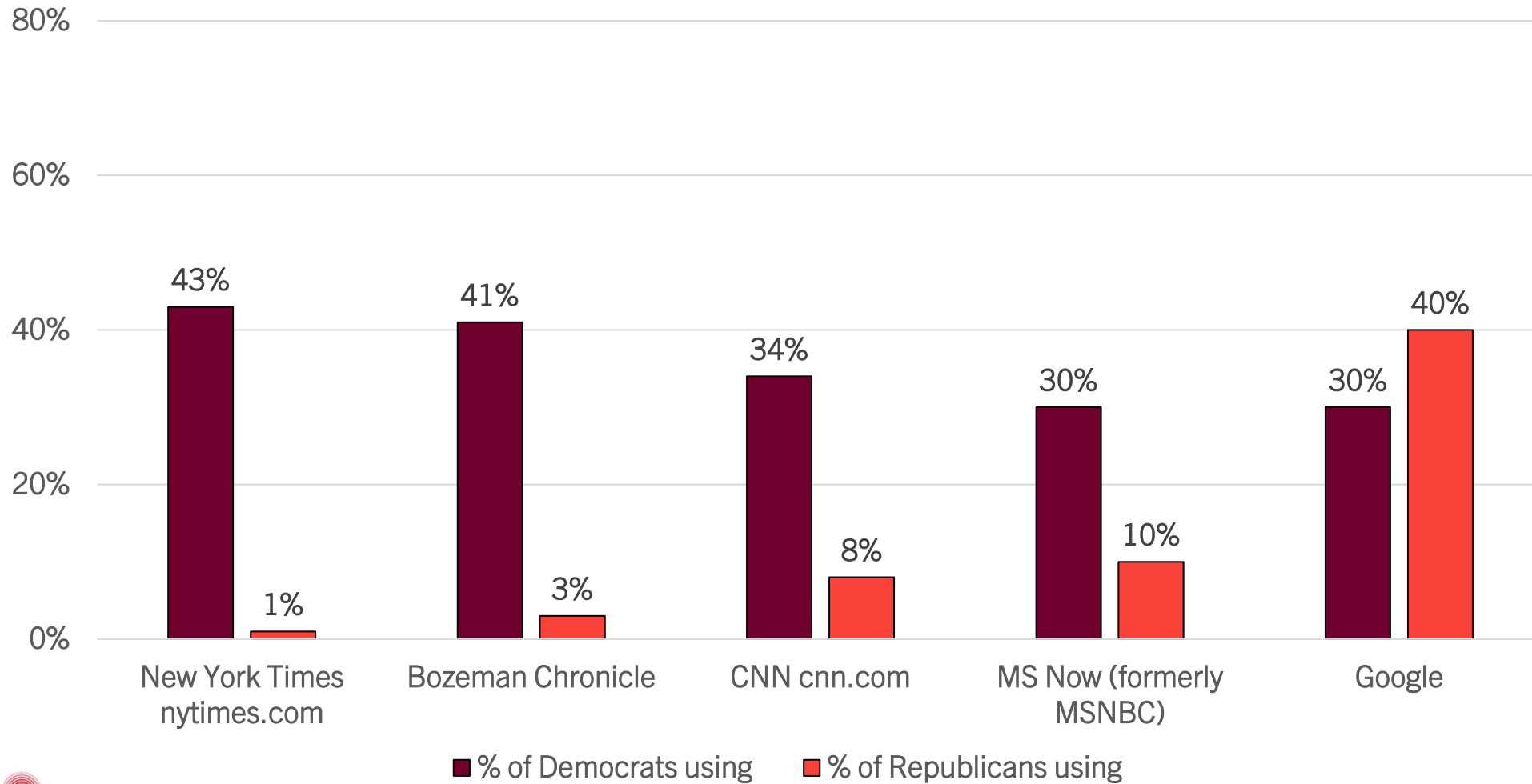
News silos, echo chambers, and news fatigue

What specific news source do you consider the most trusted source of information?

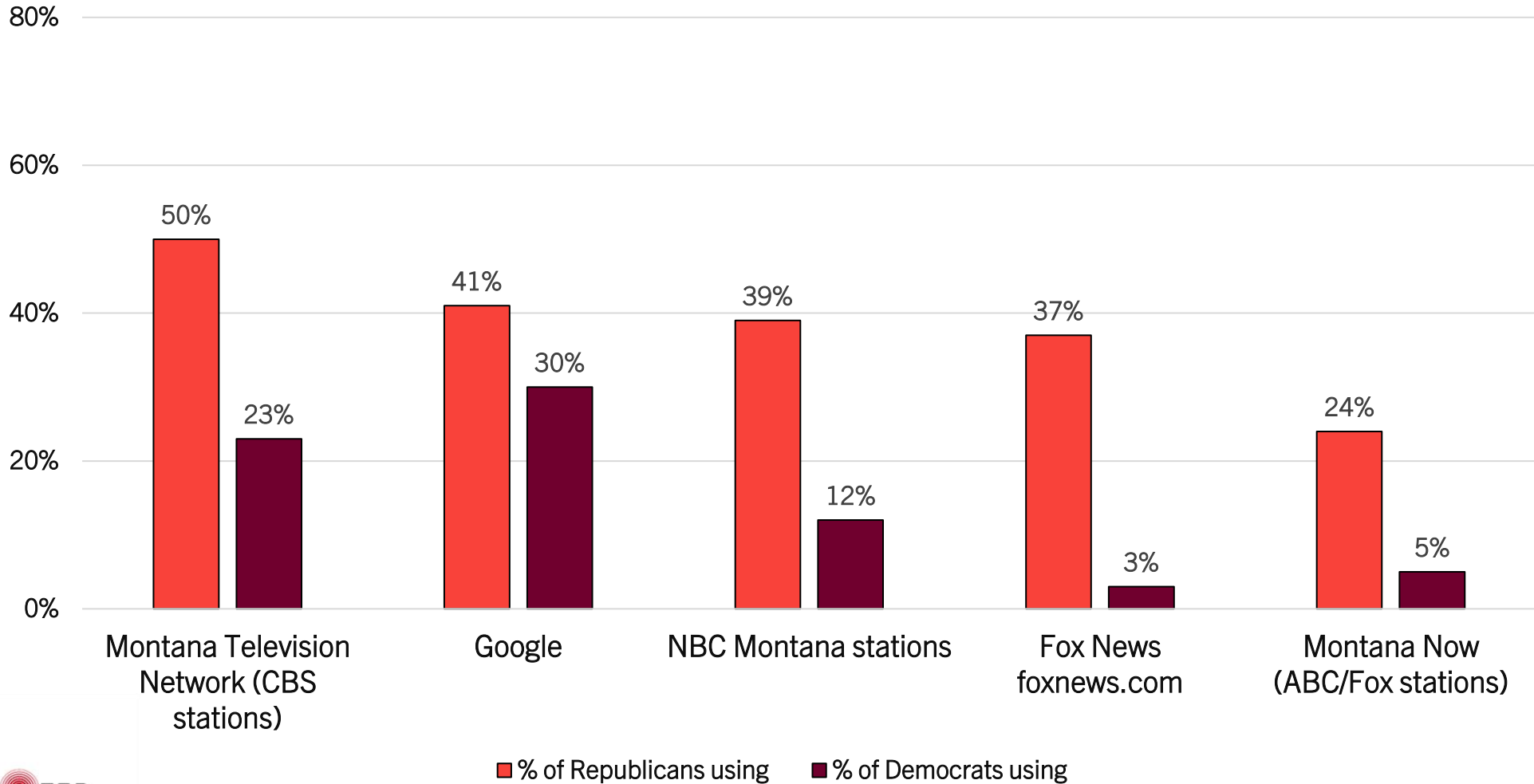
Top answers from an open-ended question



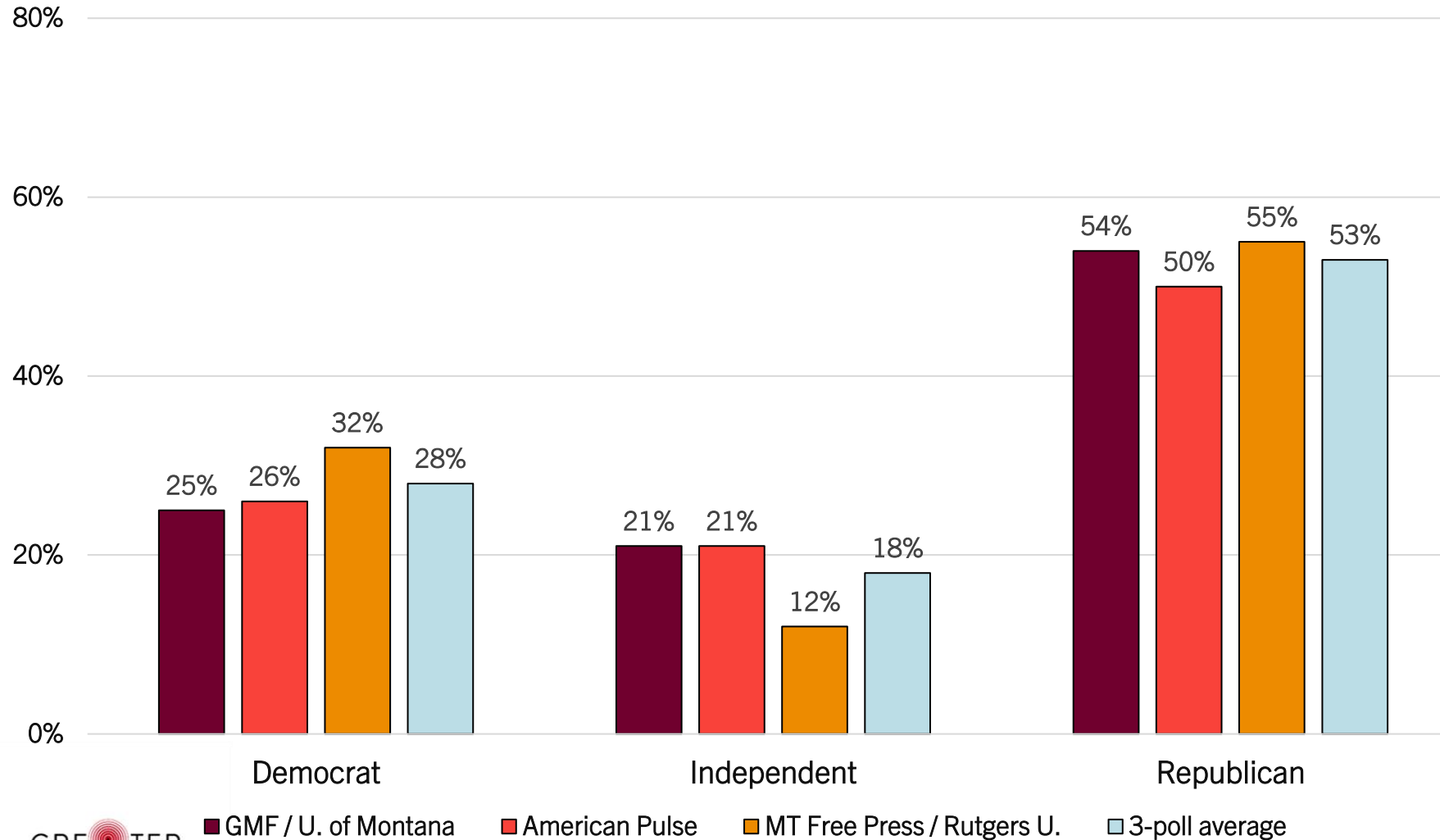
Democrats' sources of internet news



Republicans' sources of internet news



Montana Political Party Identification with Leaners: 3 Recent Polls



Poll Details:

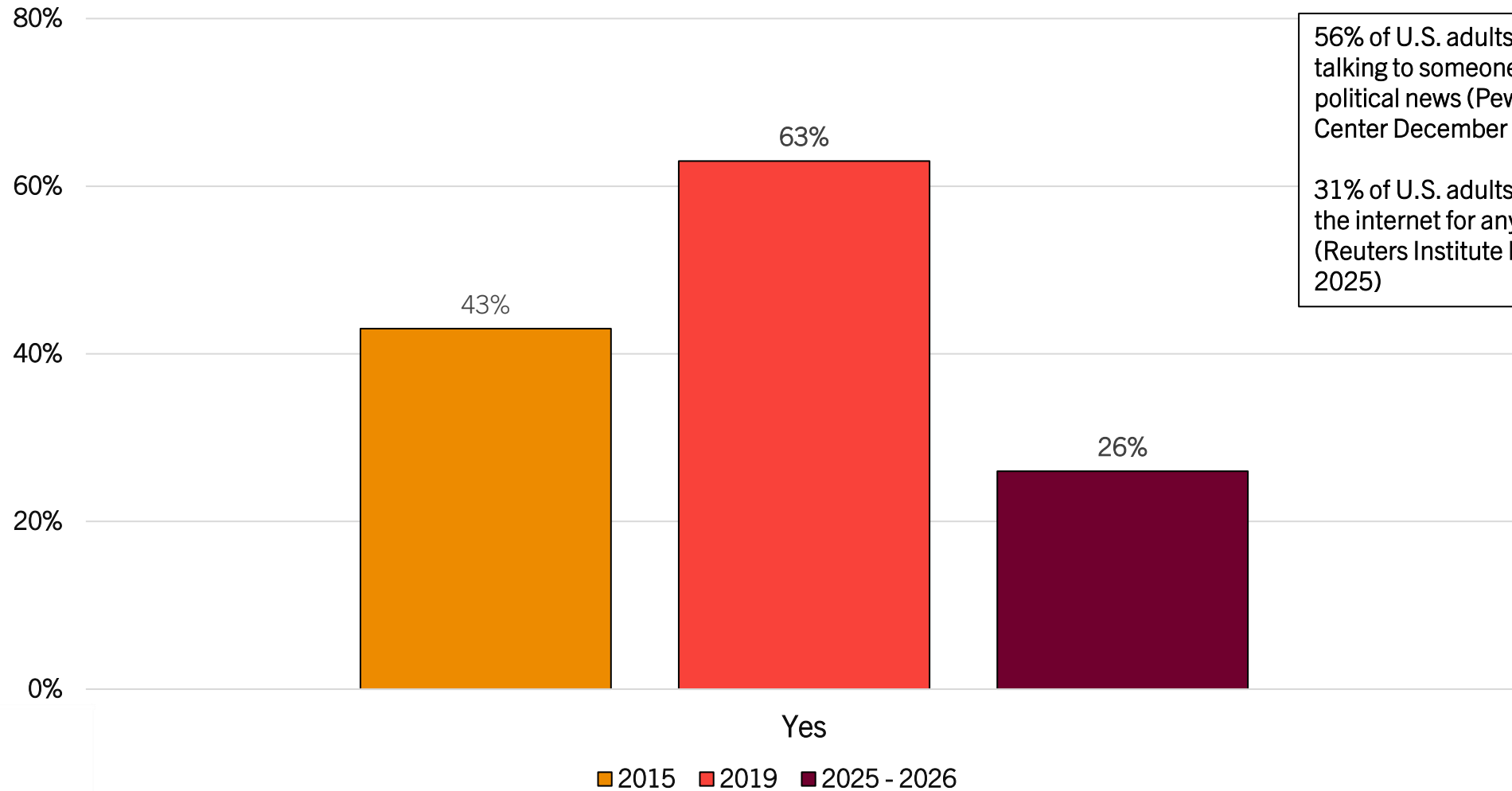
1. **GMF / U. of Montana** Nov. 2025 – Feb. 2026, 361 registered voters, address-based mail with web or mail response

2. **American Pulse** Feb. 2026, 607 likely voters, text-to-web, telephone, IVR

3. **MT Free Press / Rutgers U.** Dec. 2025 – Jan. 2026, 800 registered voters, text-to-web, telephone

* Percentages will not add to 100 due to rounding and handling of missing answers

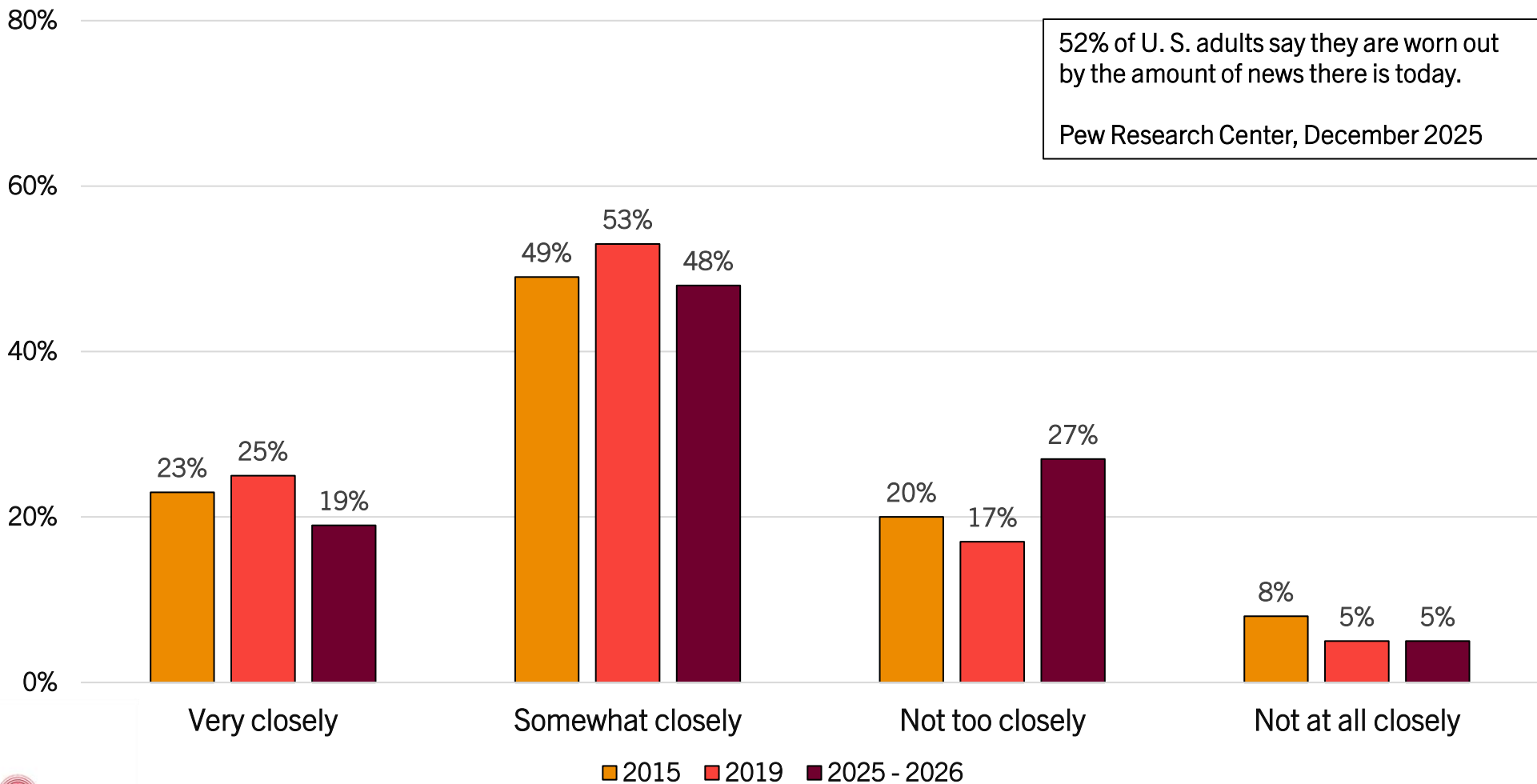
Have you ever shared a news item on the internet to influence others?



56% of U.S. adults have stopped talking to someone about political news (Pew Research Center December 2025)

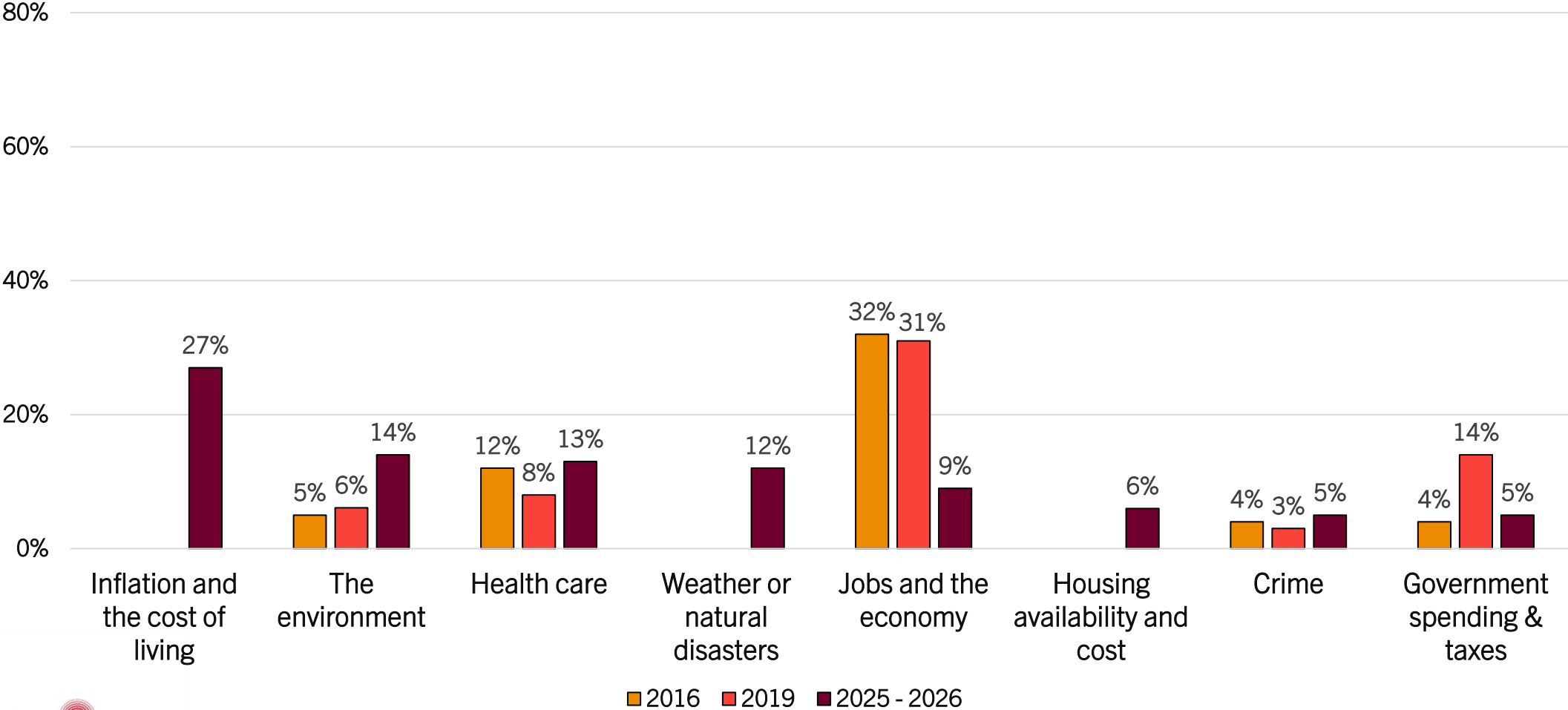
31% of U.S. adults share news on the internet for any purpose (Reuters Institute February 2025)

How closely do you follow current events in the news?



Most important issues in Montana

Which ONE of the following issues do you think is the most important issue in the state?



Most important issue by sex and age

Issue	Male 18-49	Male 50+	Female 18-49	Female 50+
Inflation and the cost of living	30%	29%	27%	22%
The environment	10%	21%	11%	20%
Health care	9%	8%	10%	26%
Weather or natural disasters	1%	11%	*	4%
Jobs and the economy	11%	13%	0%	15%
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Most important issue by urban/rural and party

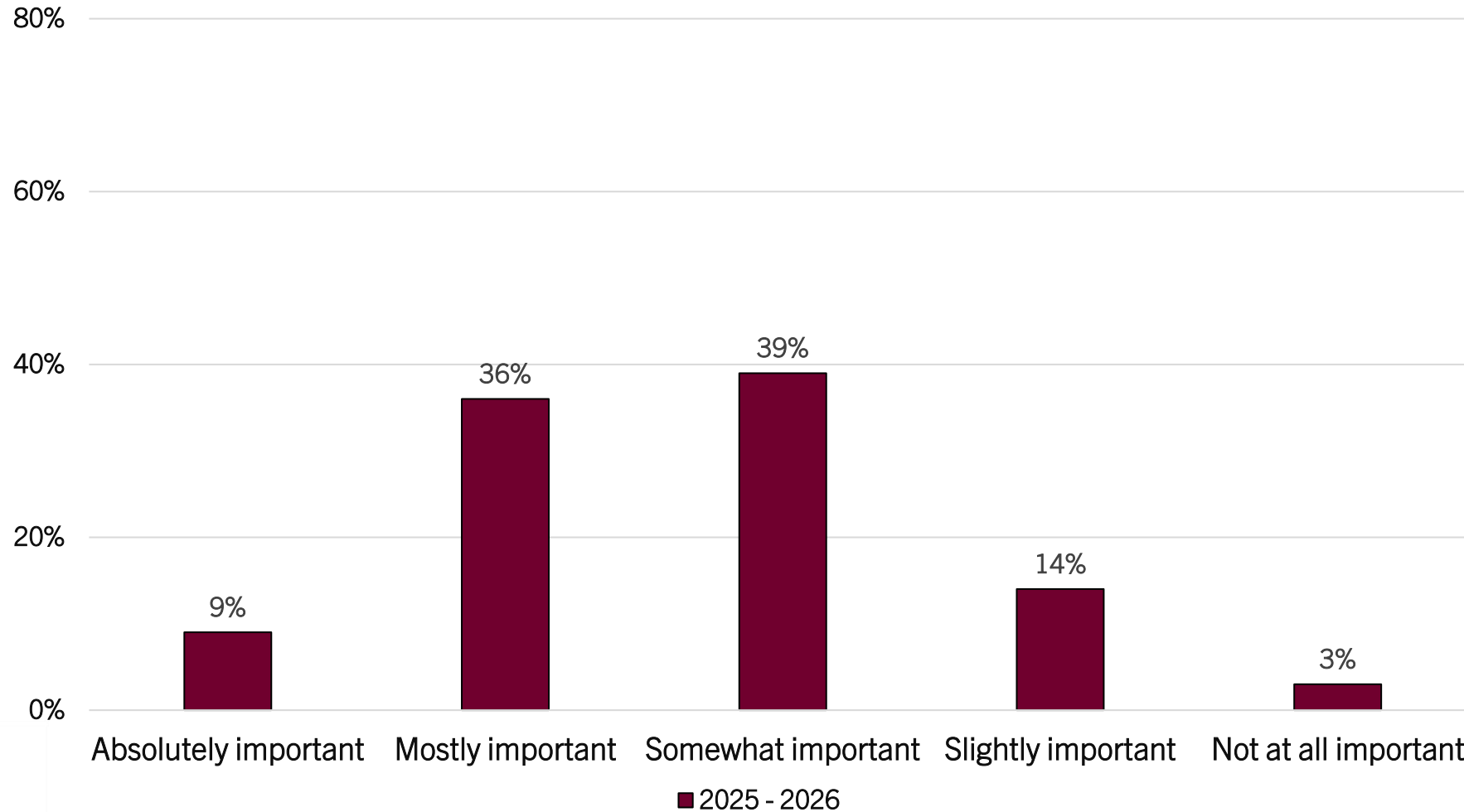
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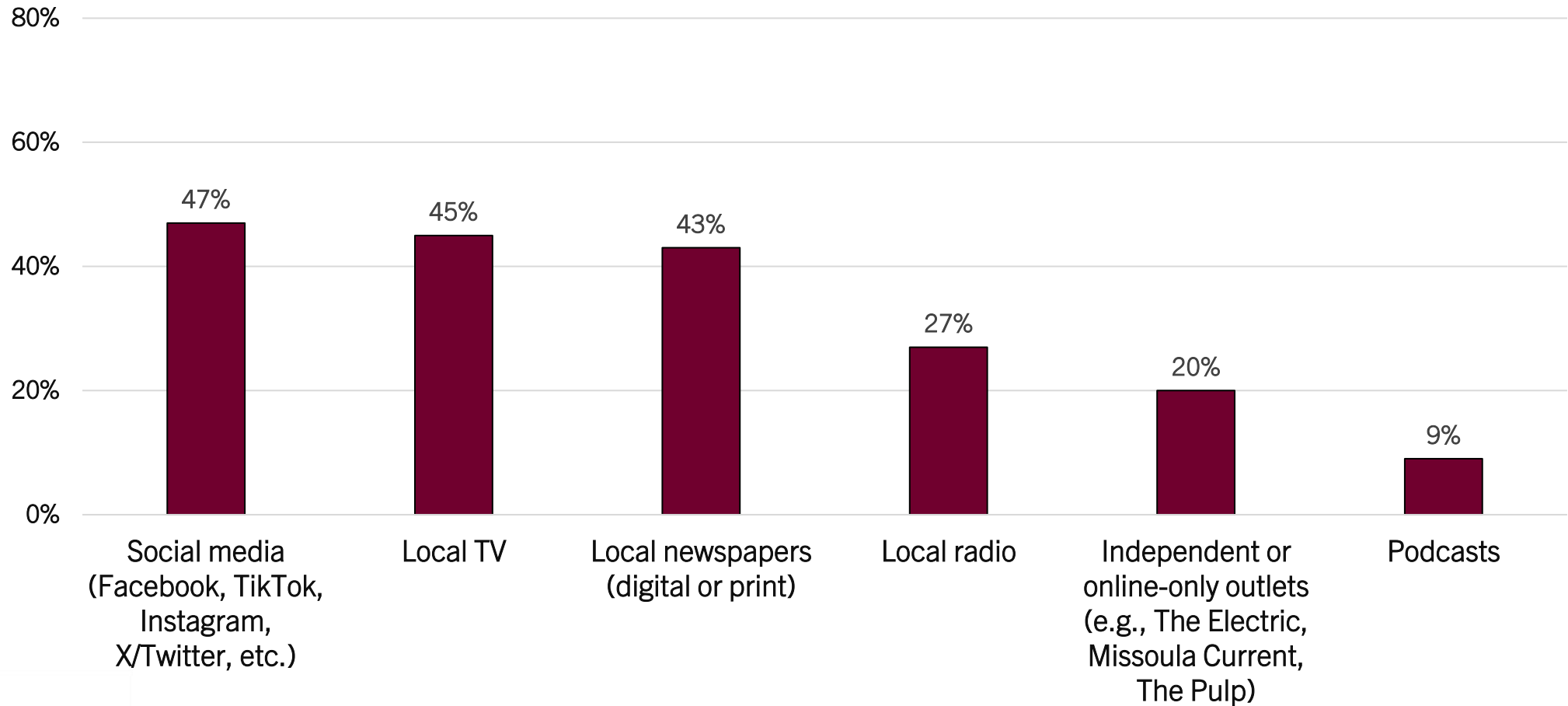
Rural = all other counties.

Local news remains important in Montana

How important is local news to you and your family?



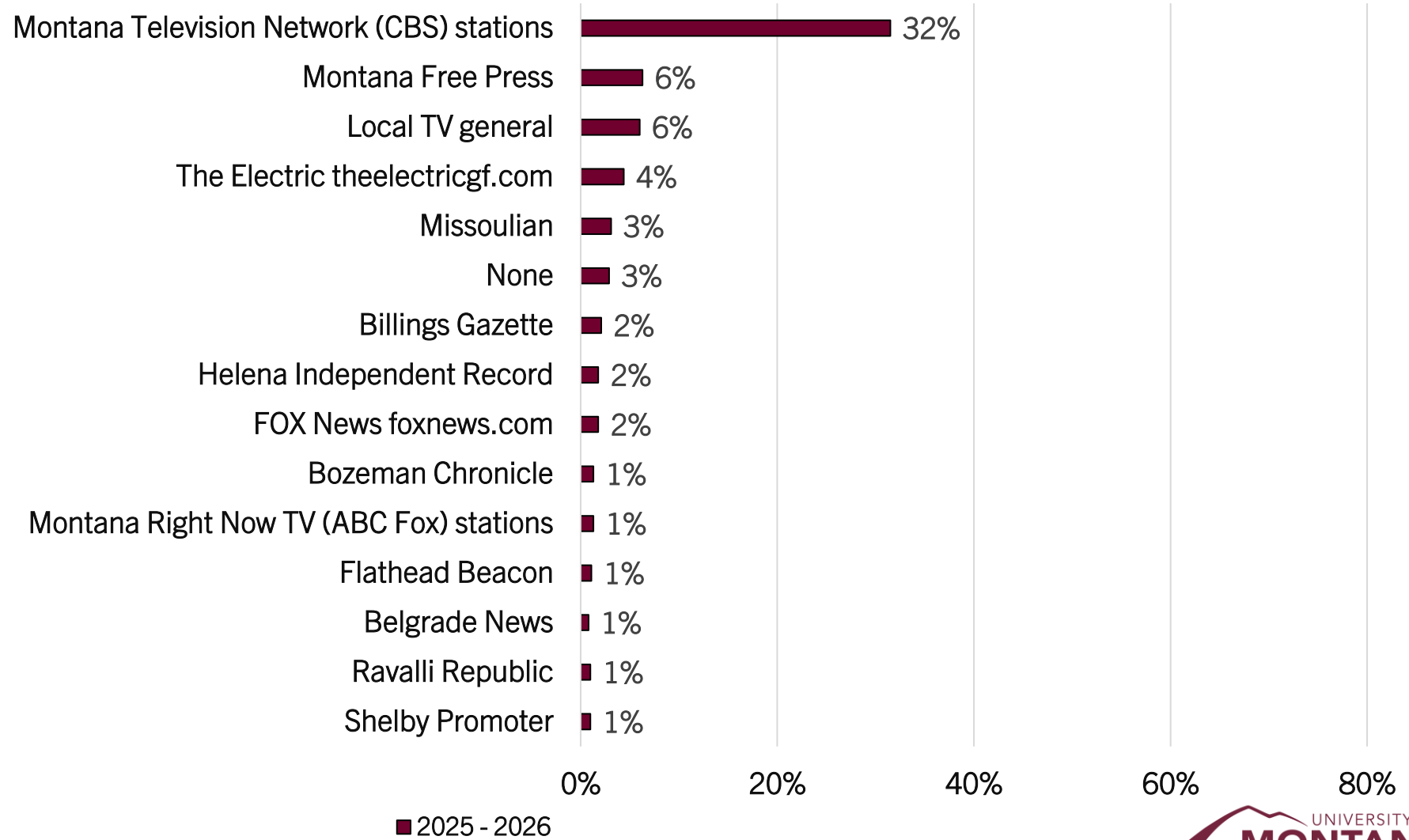
Where do you most often get your local news and information?



■ 2025 - 2026

What specific local news source do you consider the most trusted source of information?

Top answers to an open-ended question



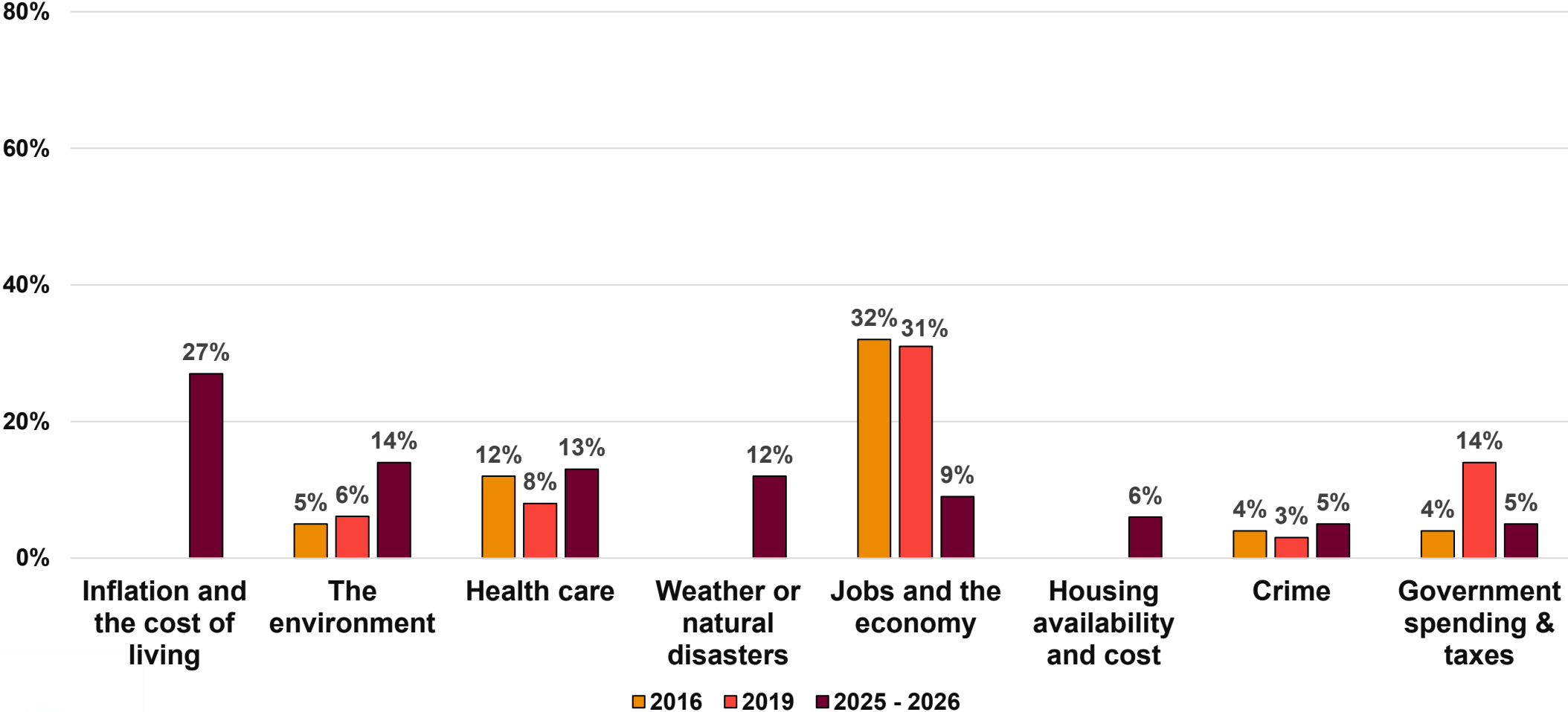
Questions?



***2025 – 2026
SOURCES OF
NEWS SURVEY***

Complete results

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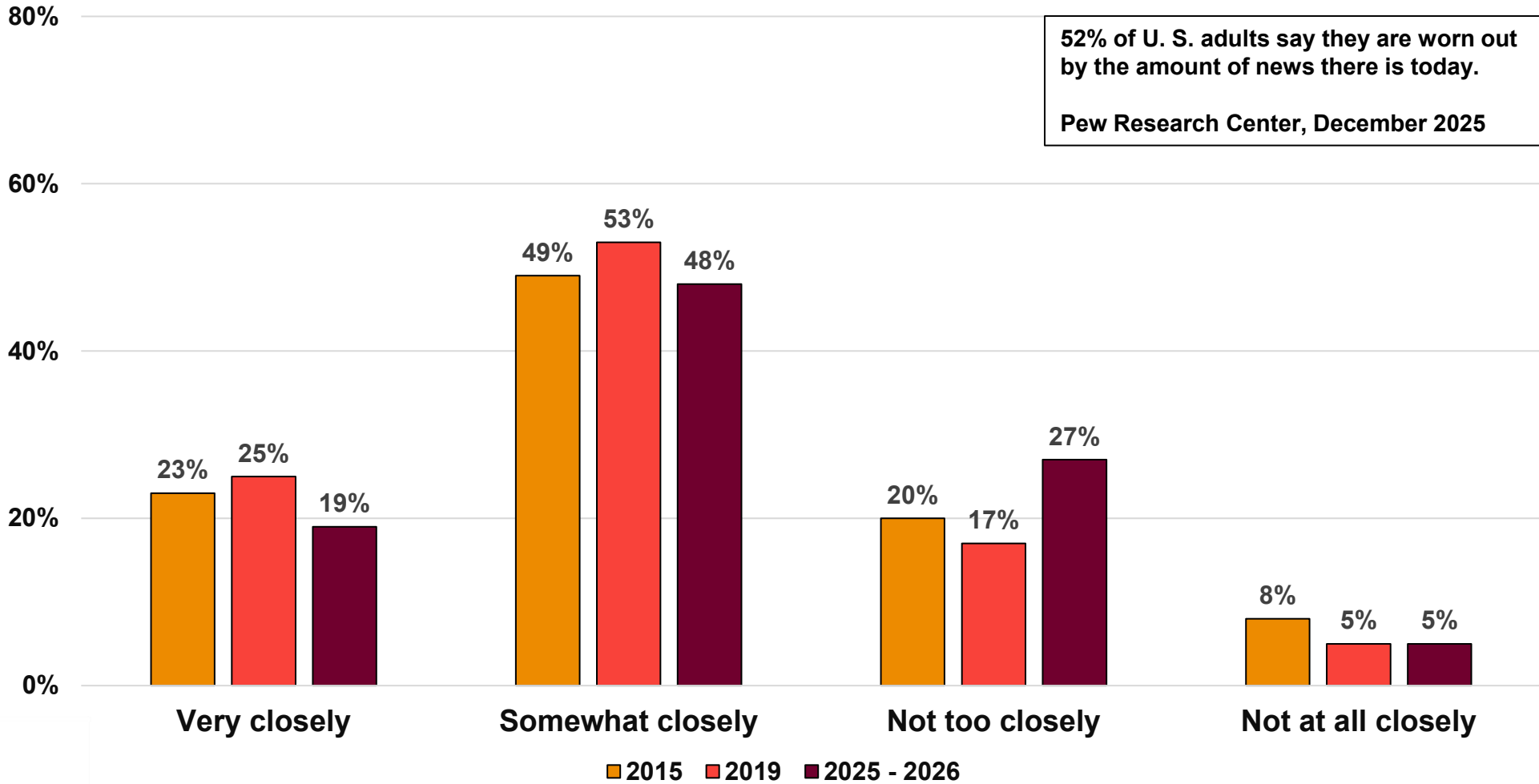
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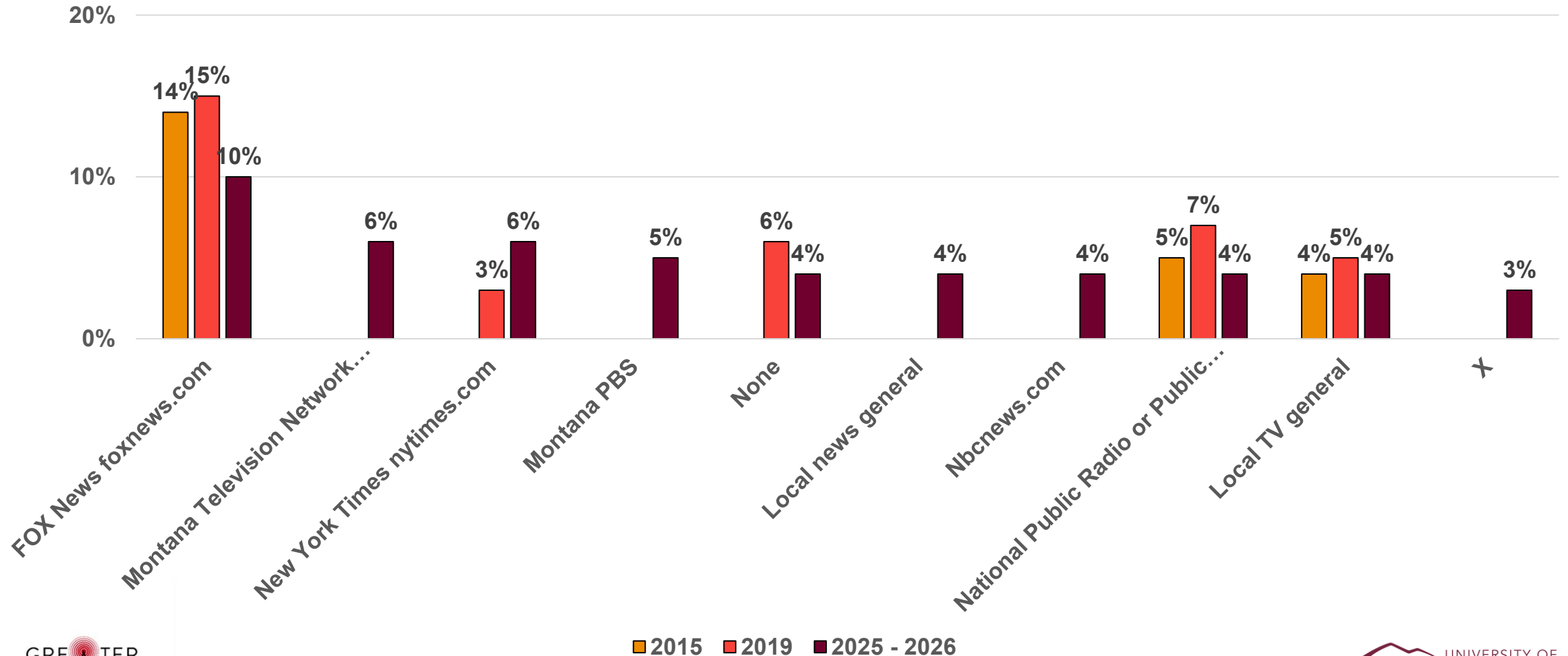
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How closely do you follow current events in the news?

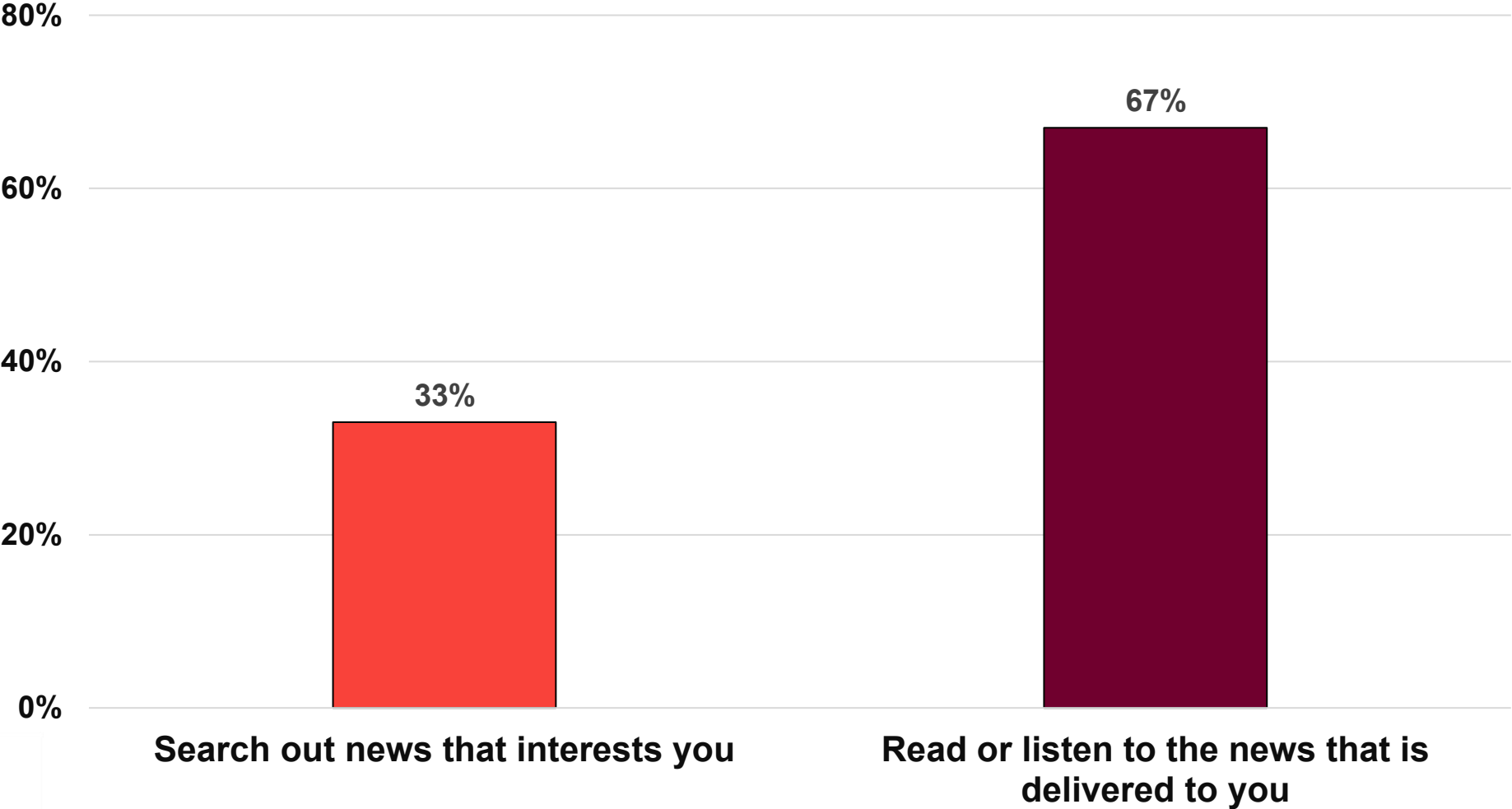


What specific news source do you consider the most trusted source of information?

Top answers from an open-ended question



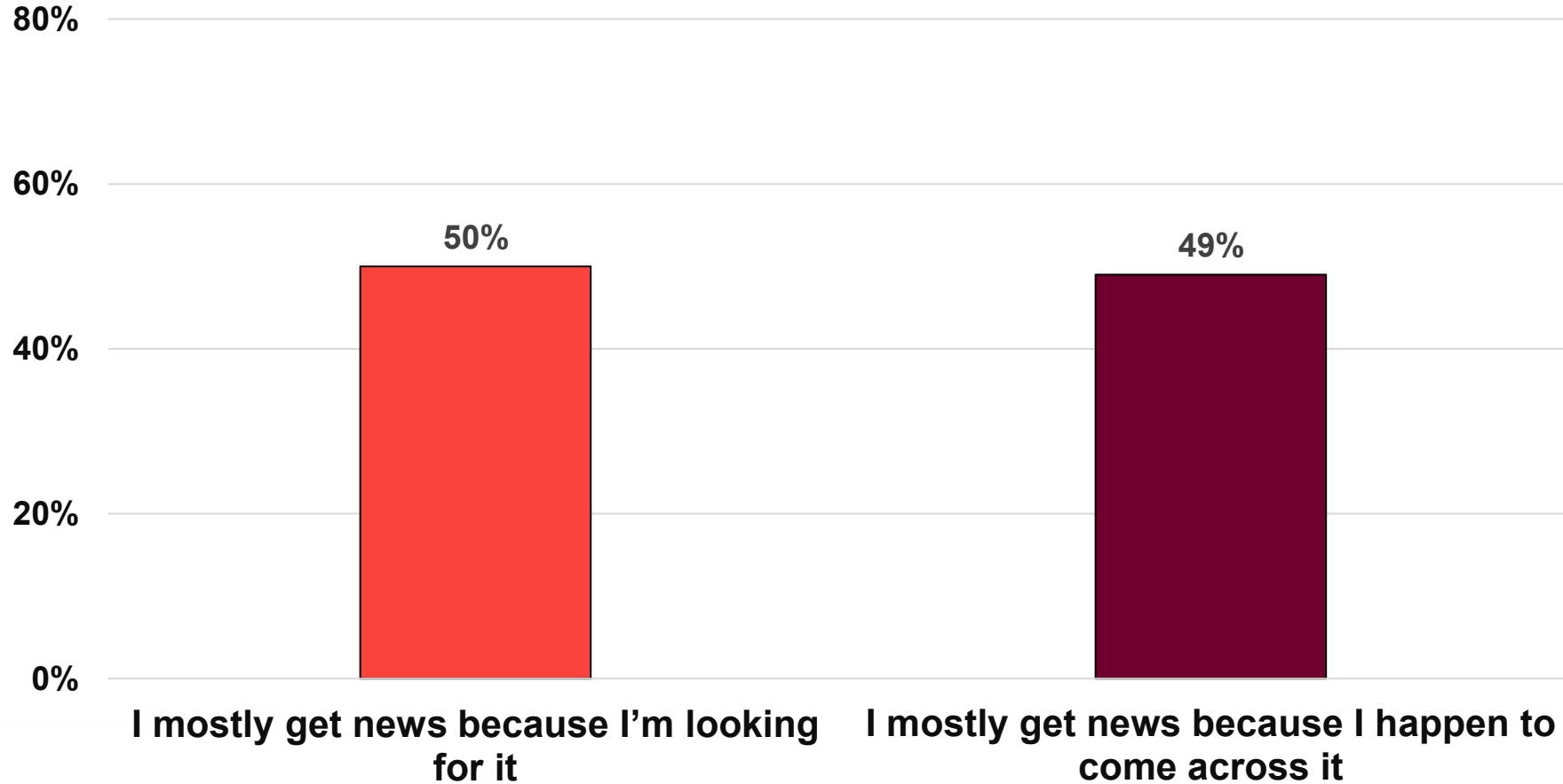
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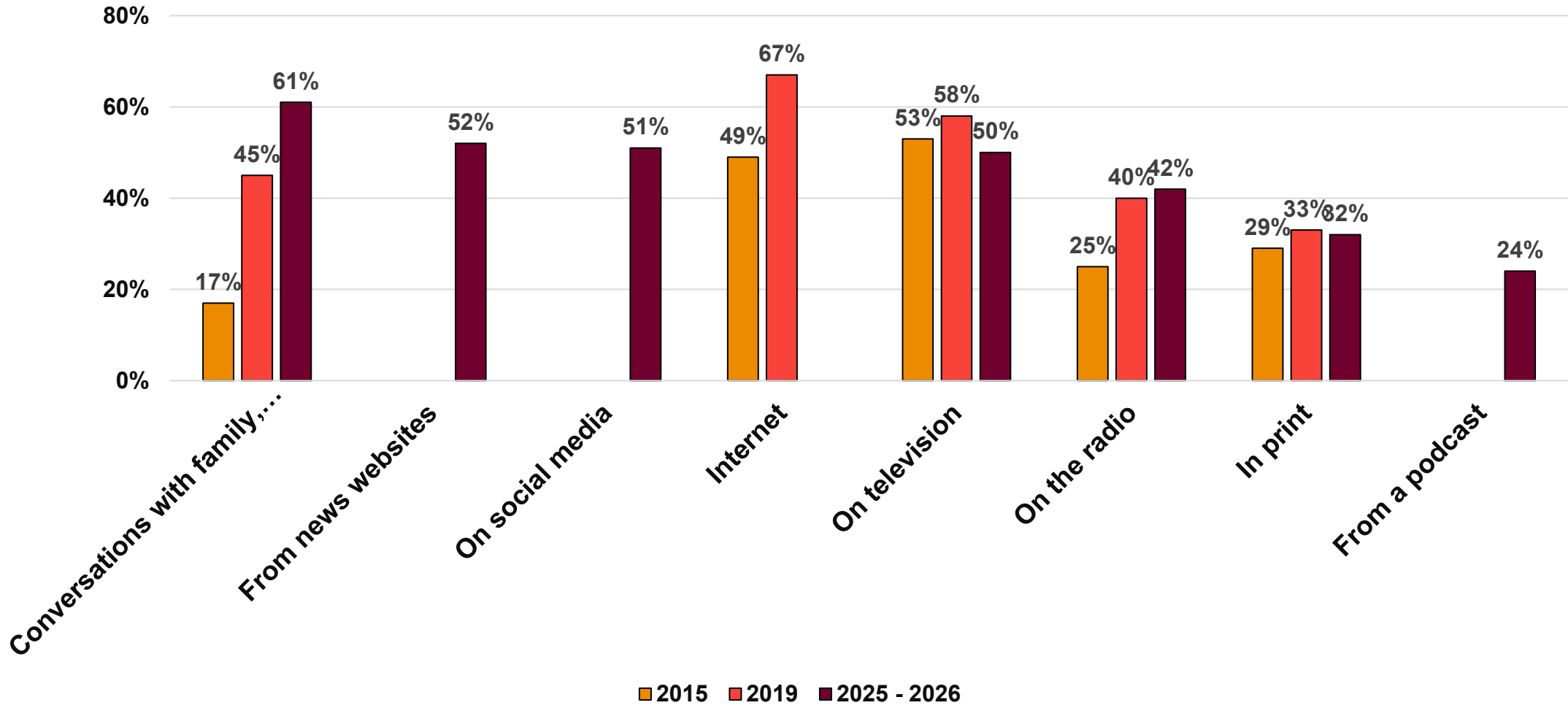
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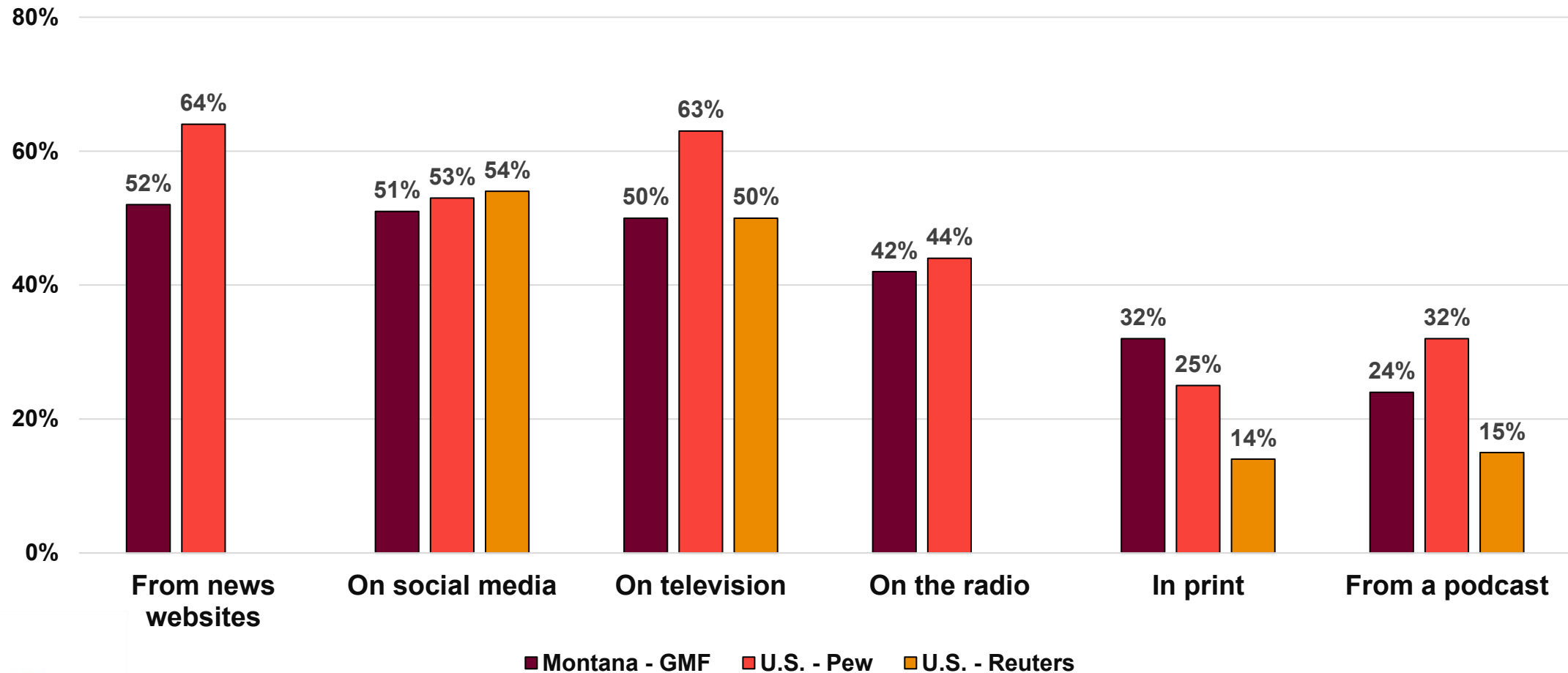
How did you get your news in the past week?



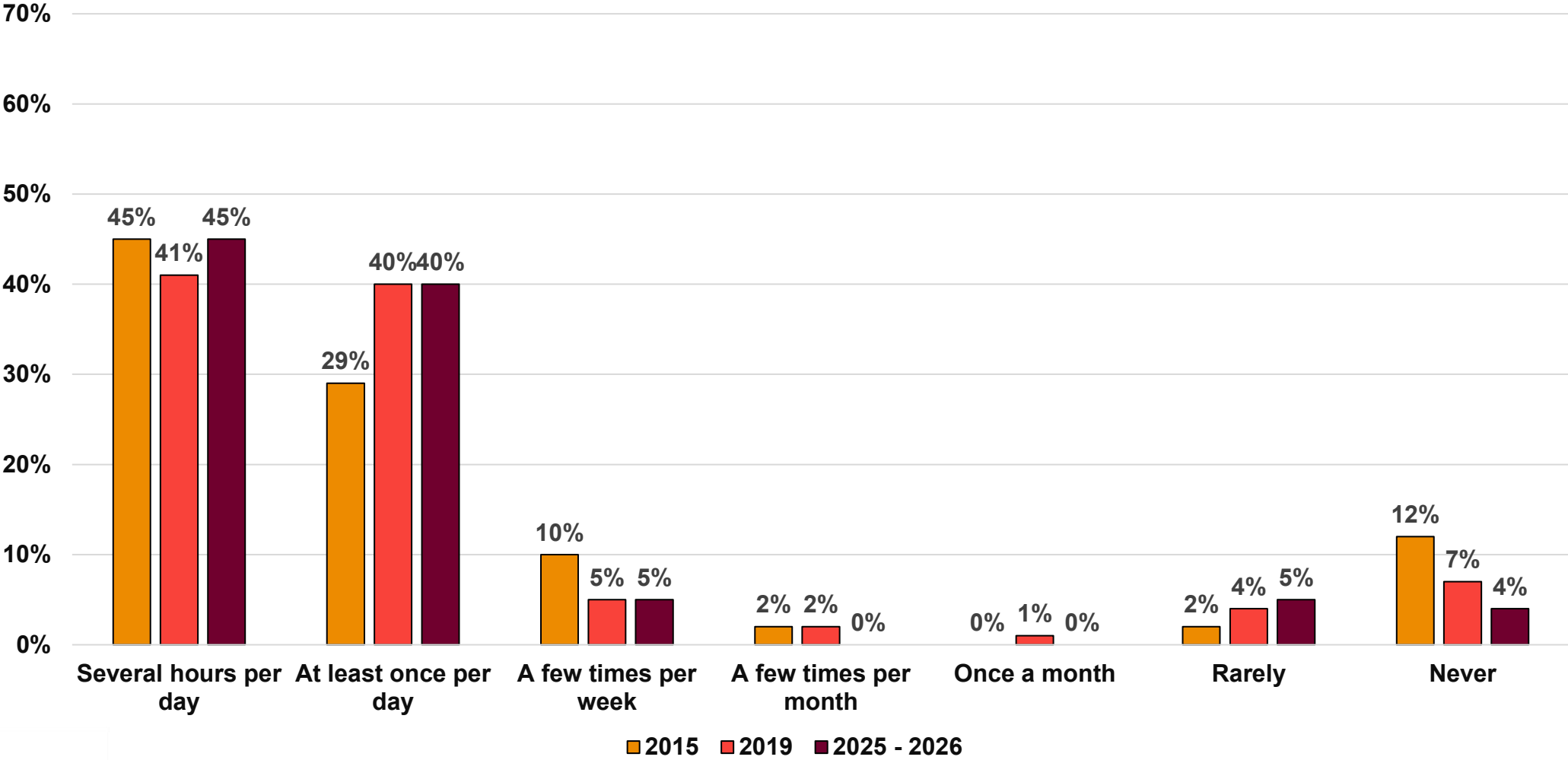
Montana compared to the U.S.

Pew Research Center Aug. 2025 and Reuters Institute Feb. 2025

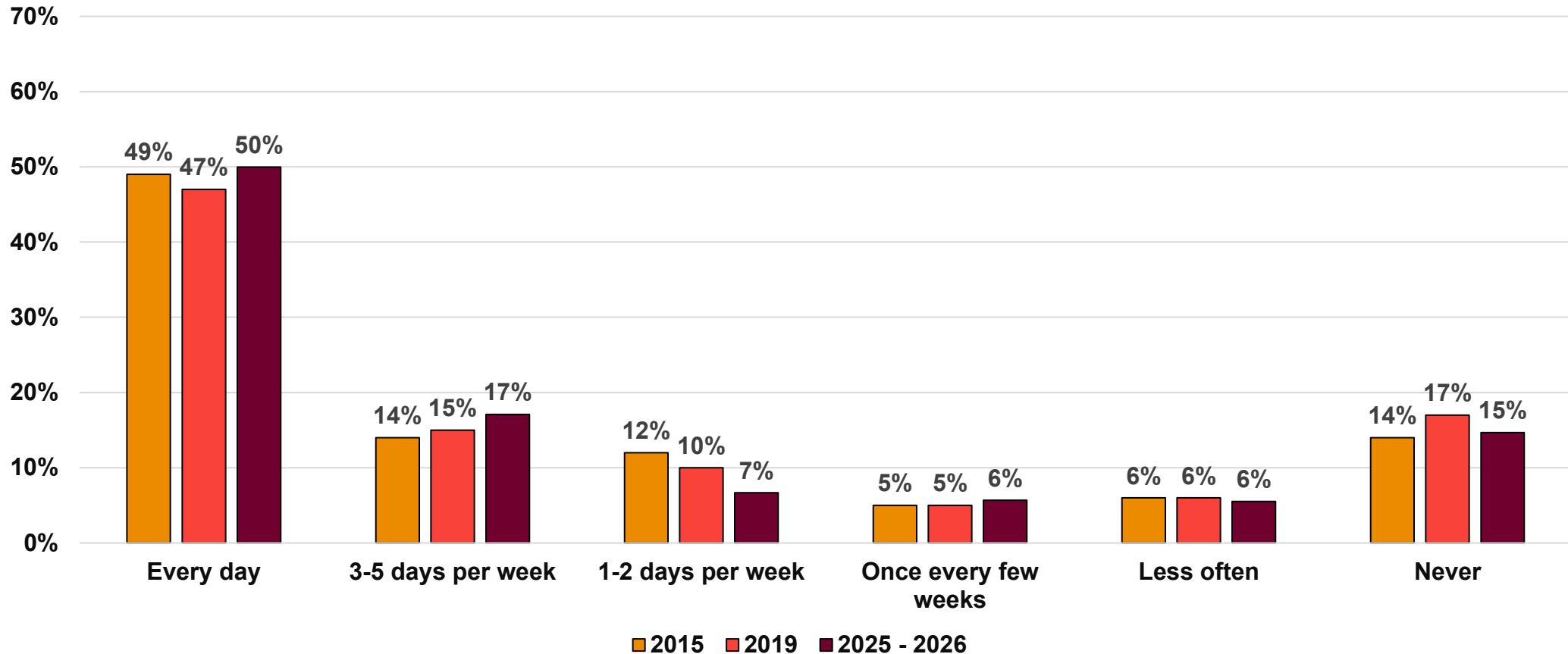
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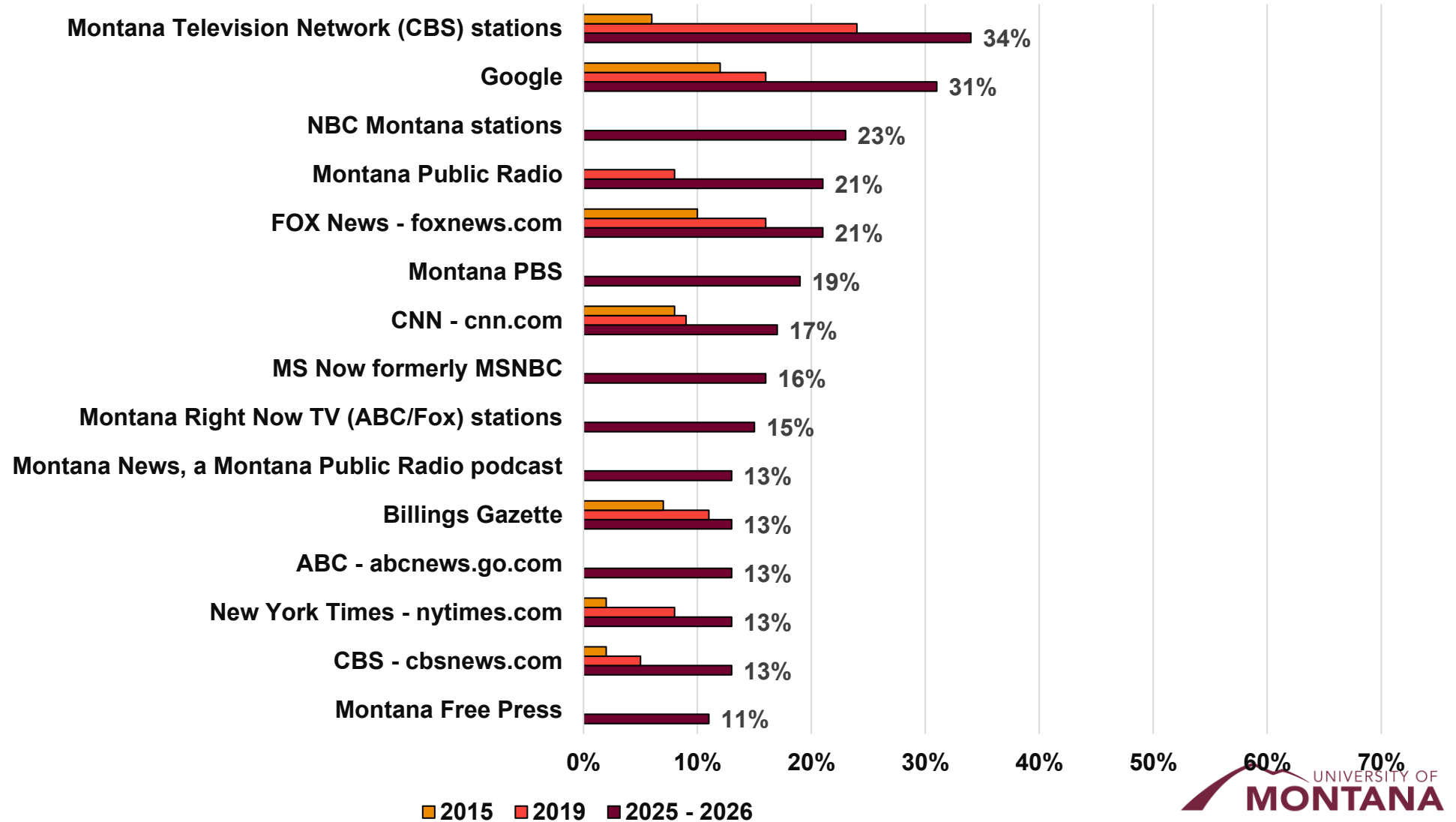
On average, how often are you on the internet?



How often do you get NEWS from internet sources like news websites, social media, or podcasts?

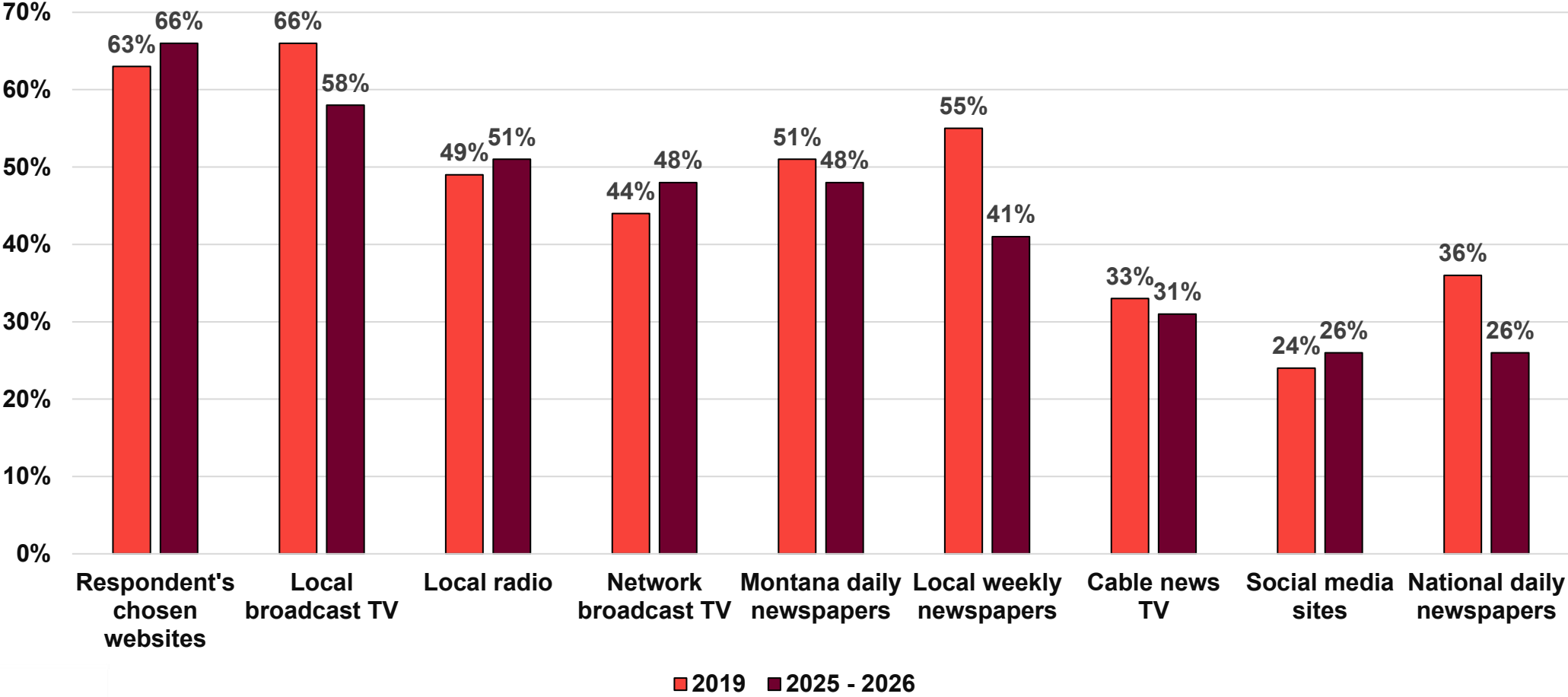


What are the sources of internet news and information you use most frequently?



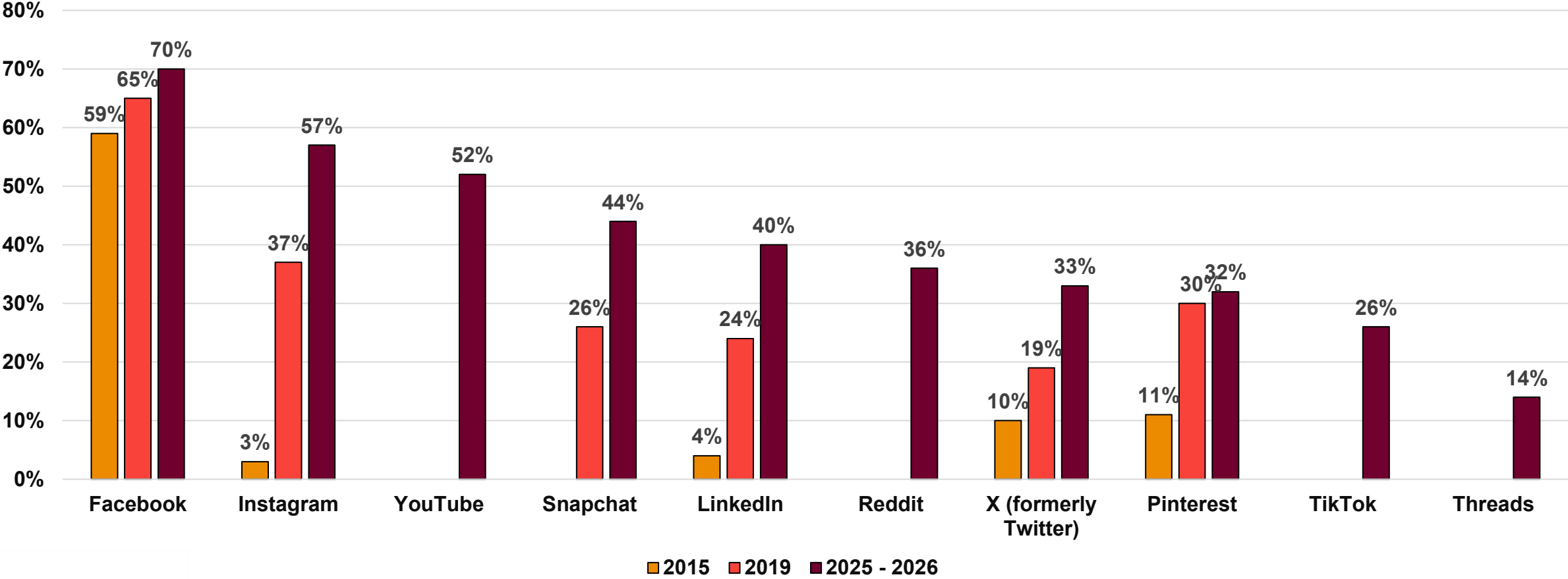
How credible are the following types of news source?

% Rate source absolutely or mostly credible



Have you ever created your own profile on any of the social media sites listed below?

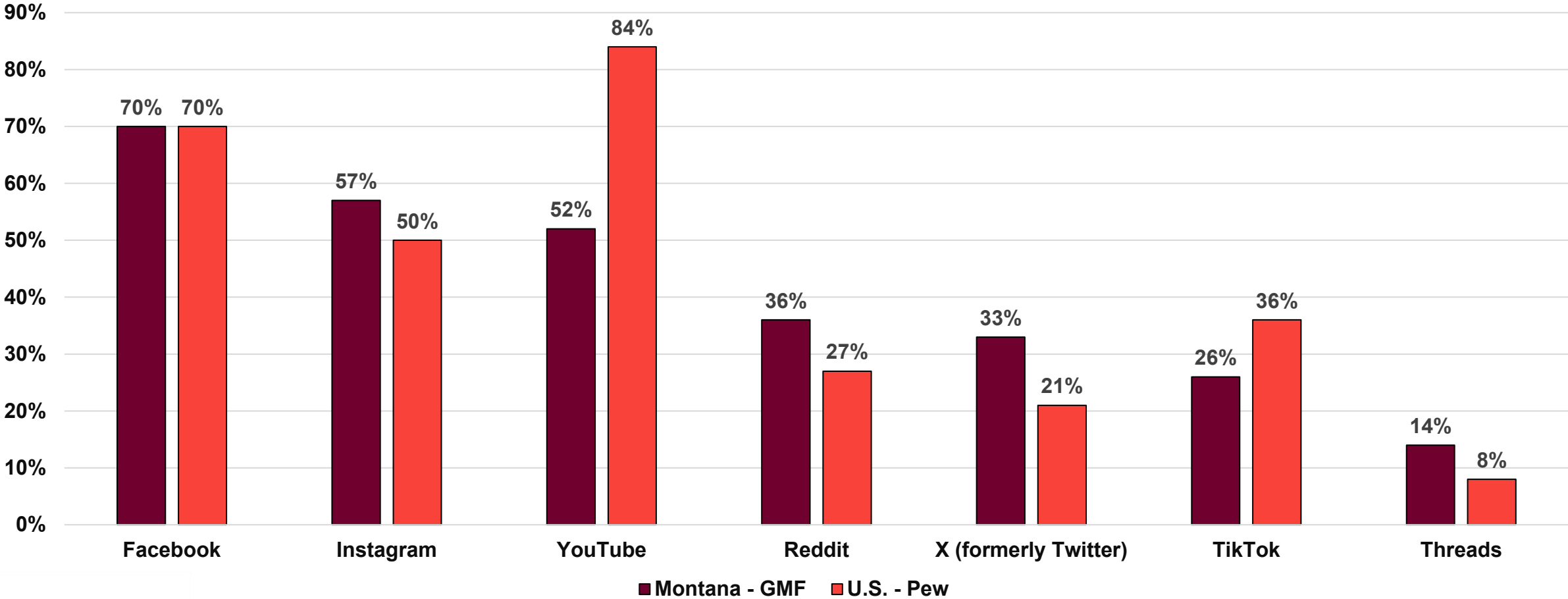
% Yes



Montana compared to the U.S. – Pew Research Center

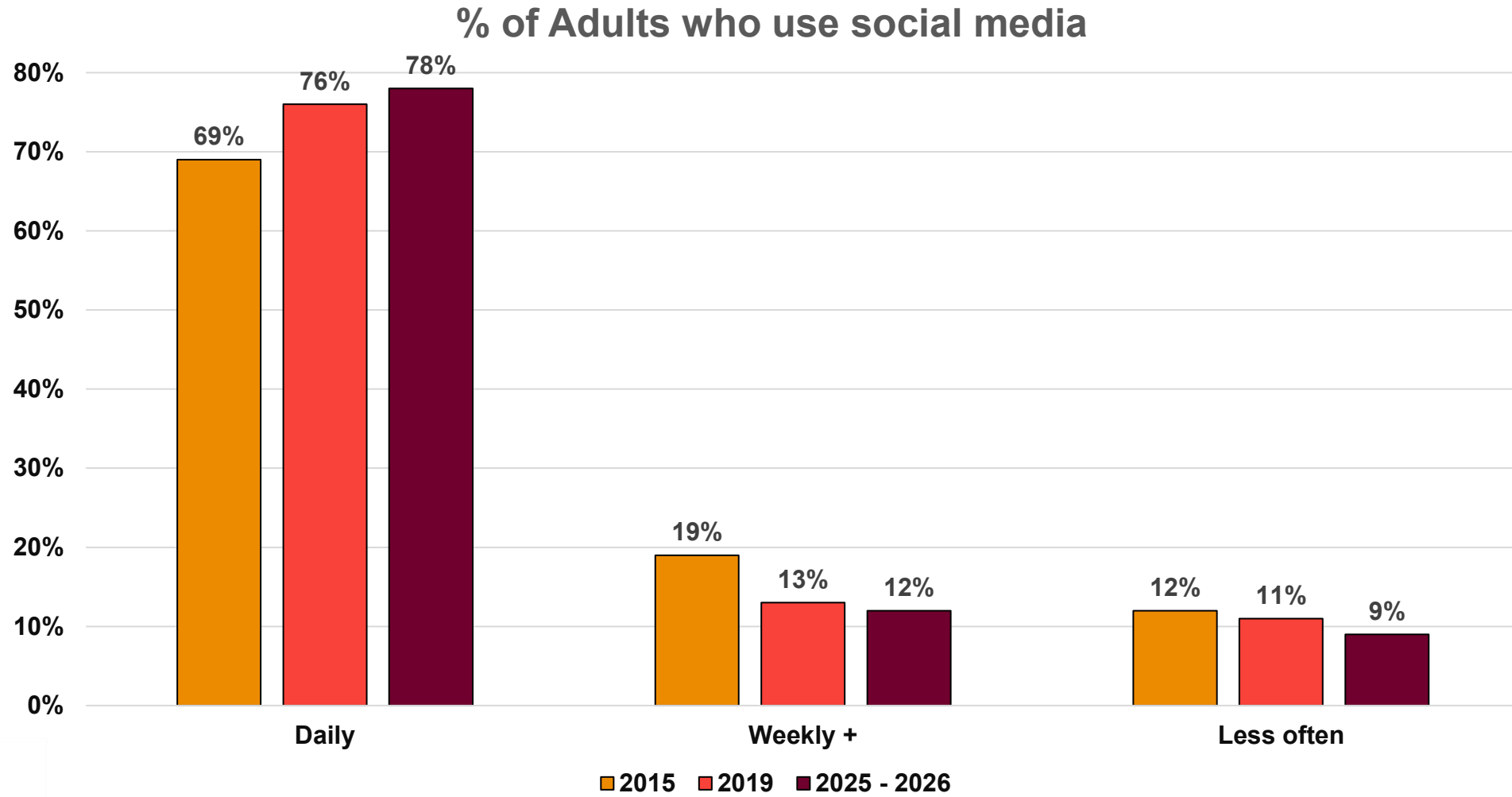
August 2025

% Ever used the following websites or apps

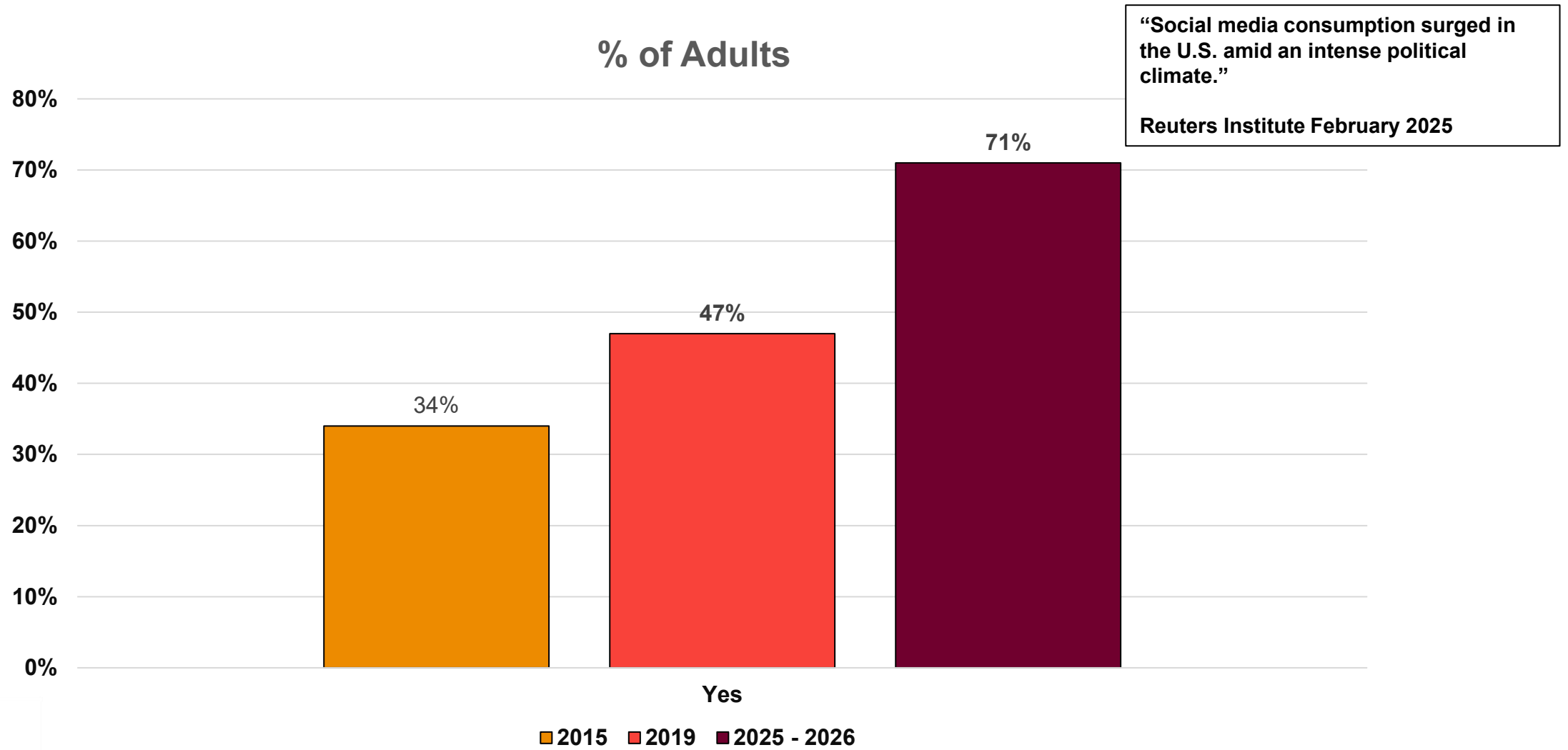


Note: survey question differences may account for some of the differences reported above.

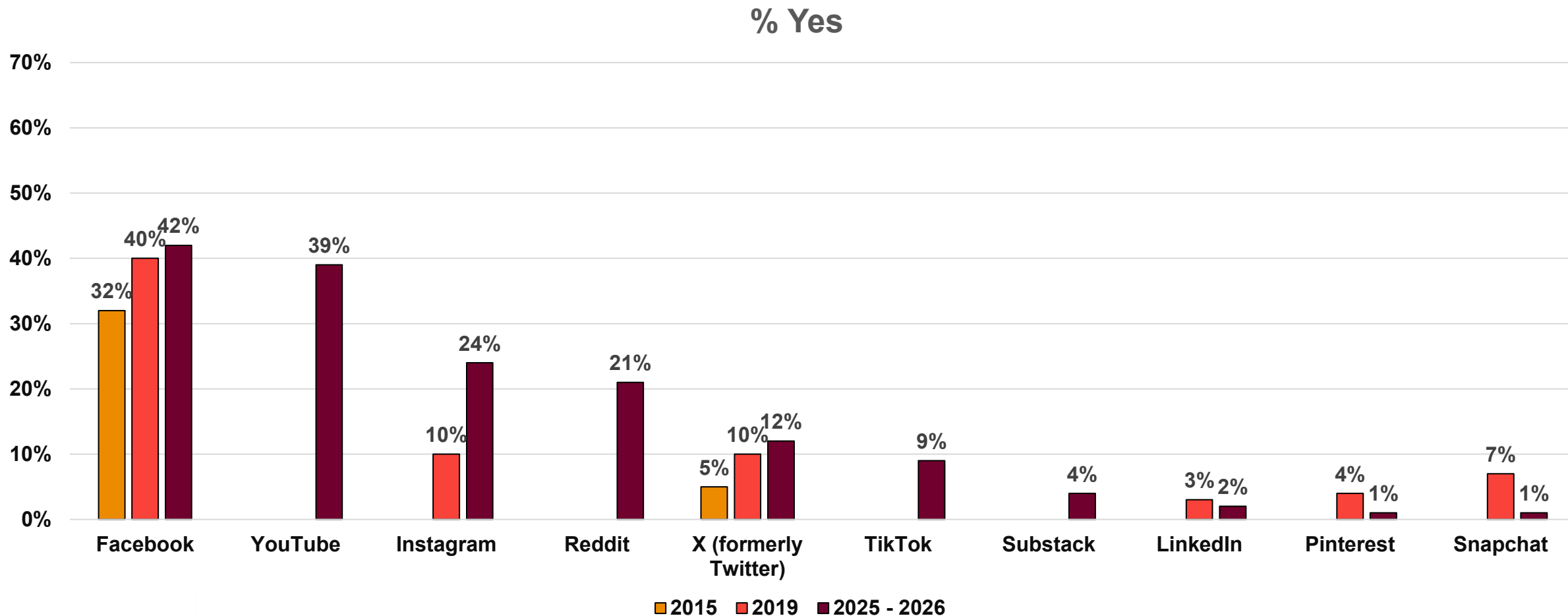
How often do you access a social media site?



Uses social media to access news or information

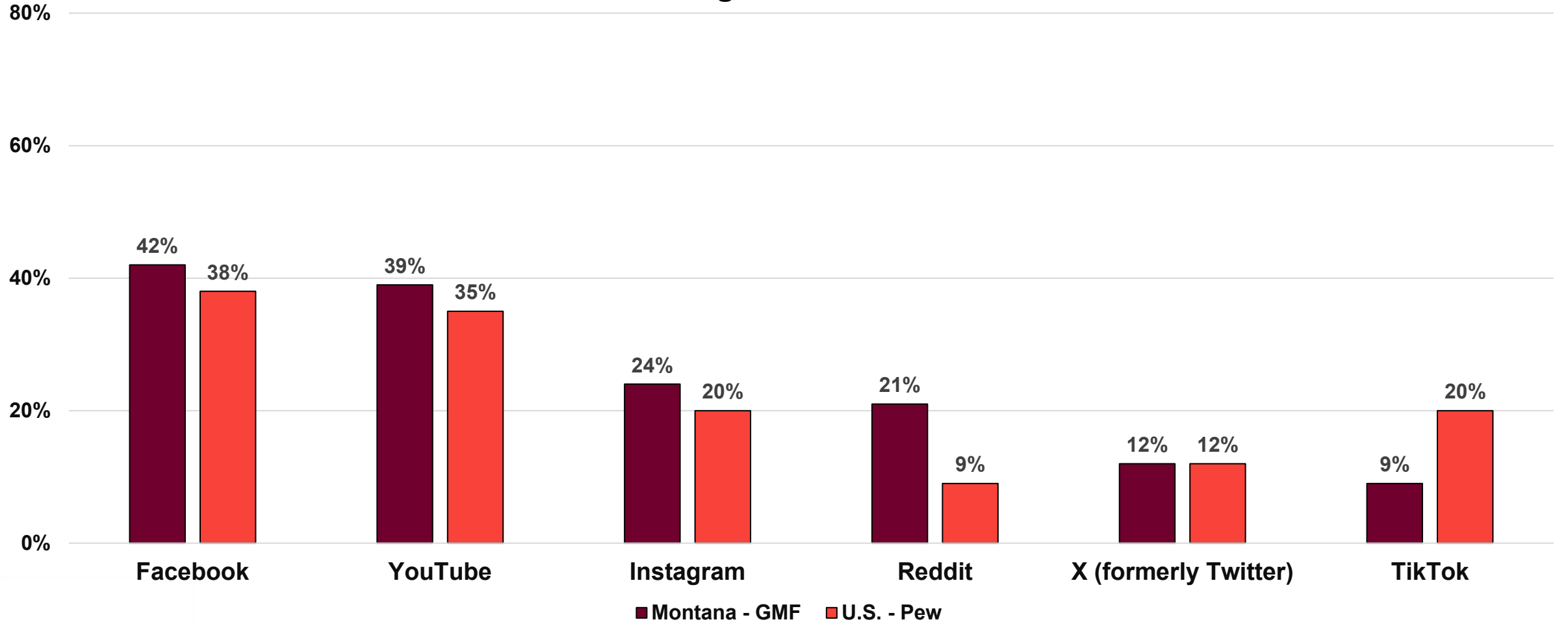


Do you use any of the following social media sites to access news or information?



Montana compared to the U.S. – Pew Research Center August 2025

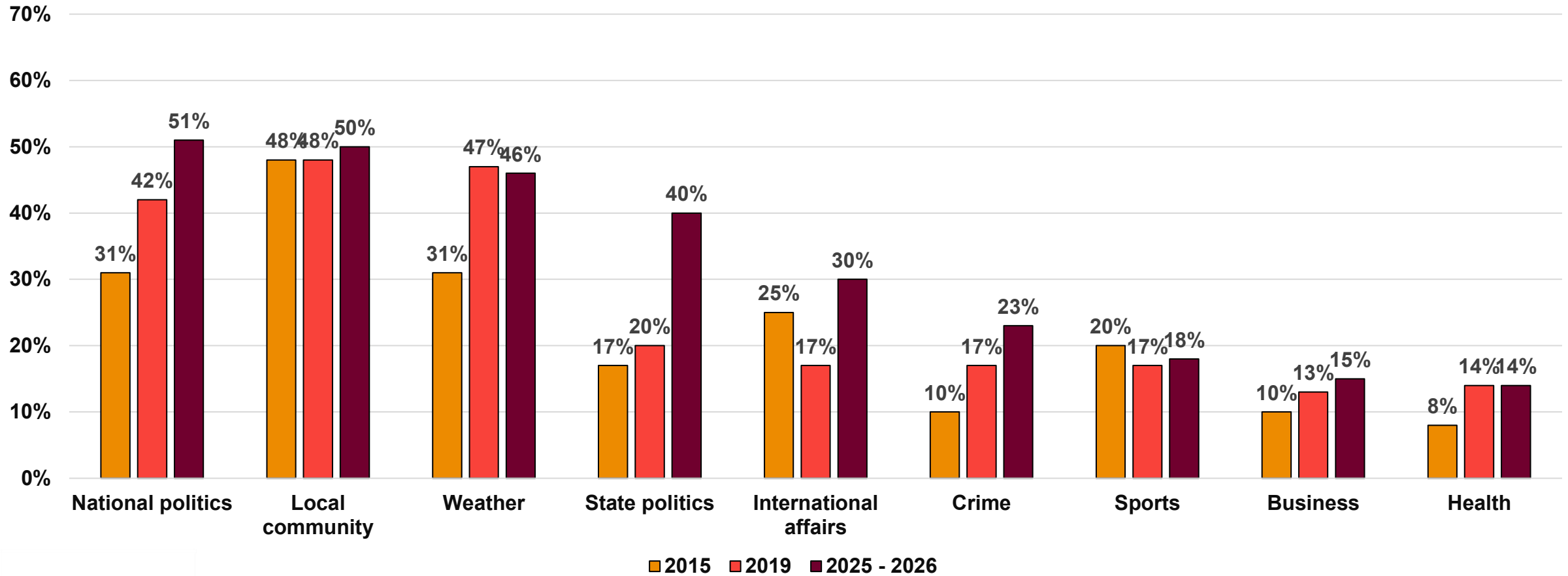
% Who get news on this site



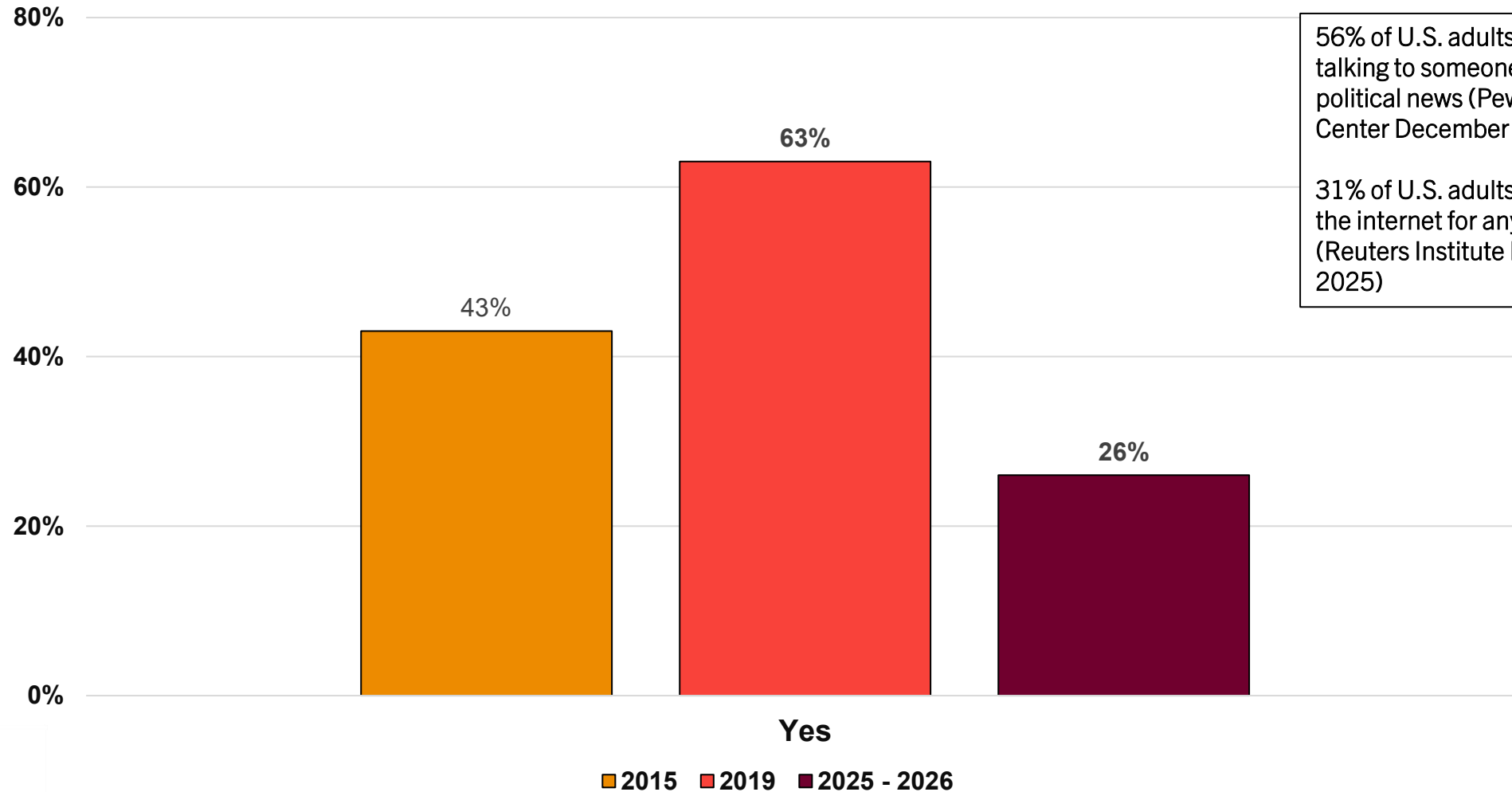
Note: survey question differences may account for some of the differences reported above.

What are the types of internet news and information content that interest you most?

% Applies



Have you ever shared a news item on the internet to influence others?

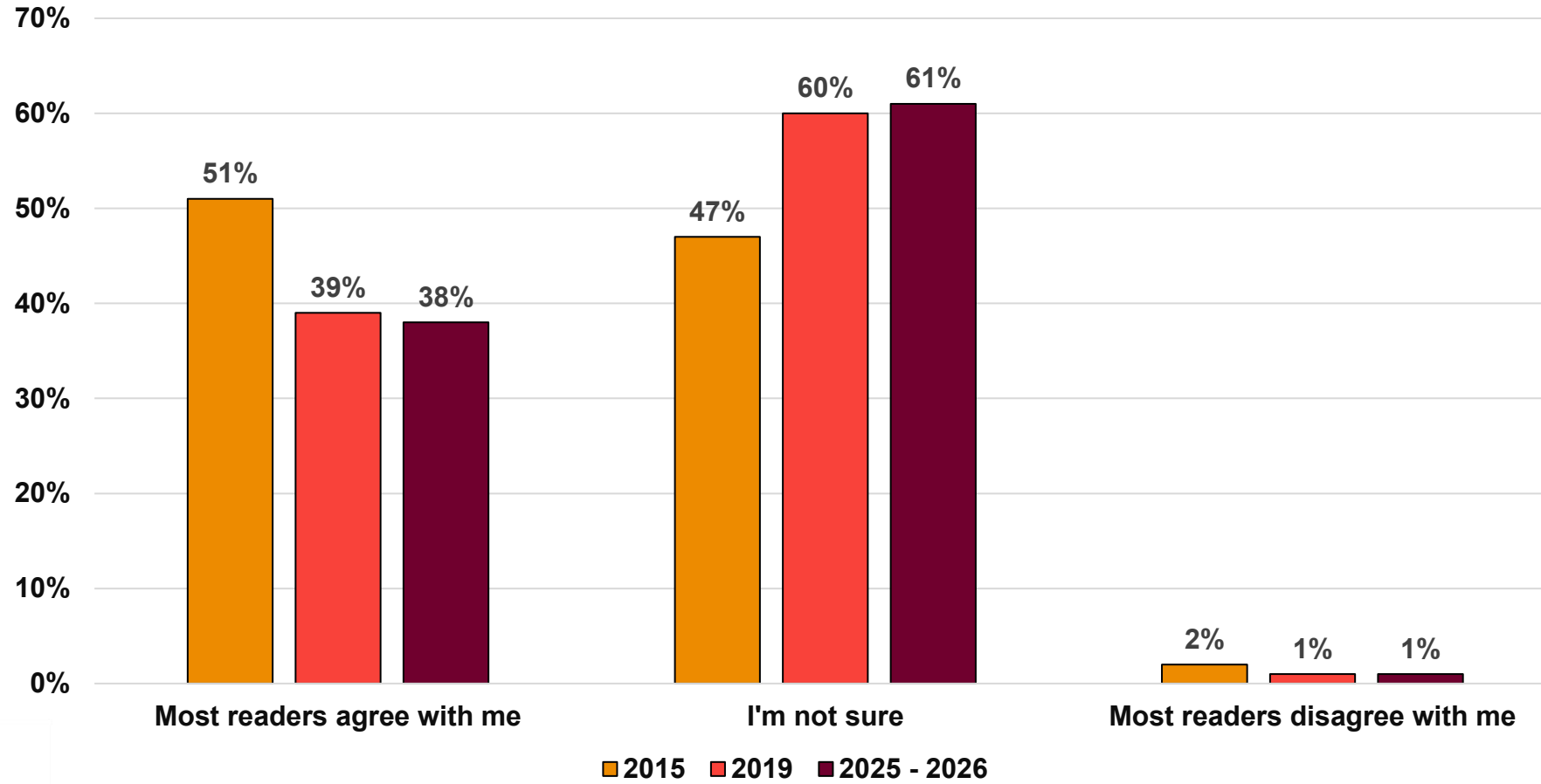


56% of U.S. adults have stopped talking to someone about political news (Pew Research Center December 2025)

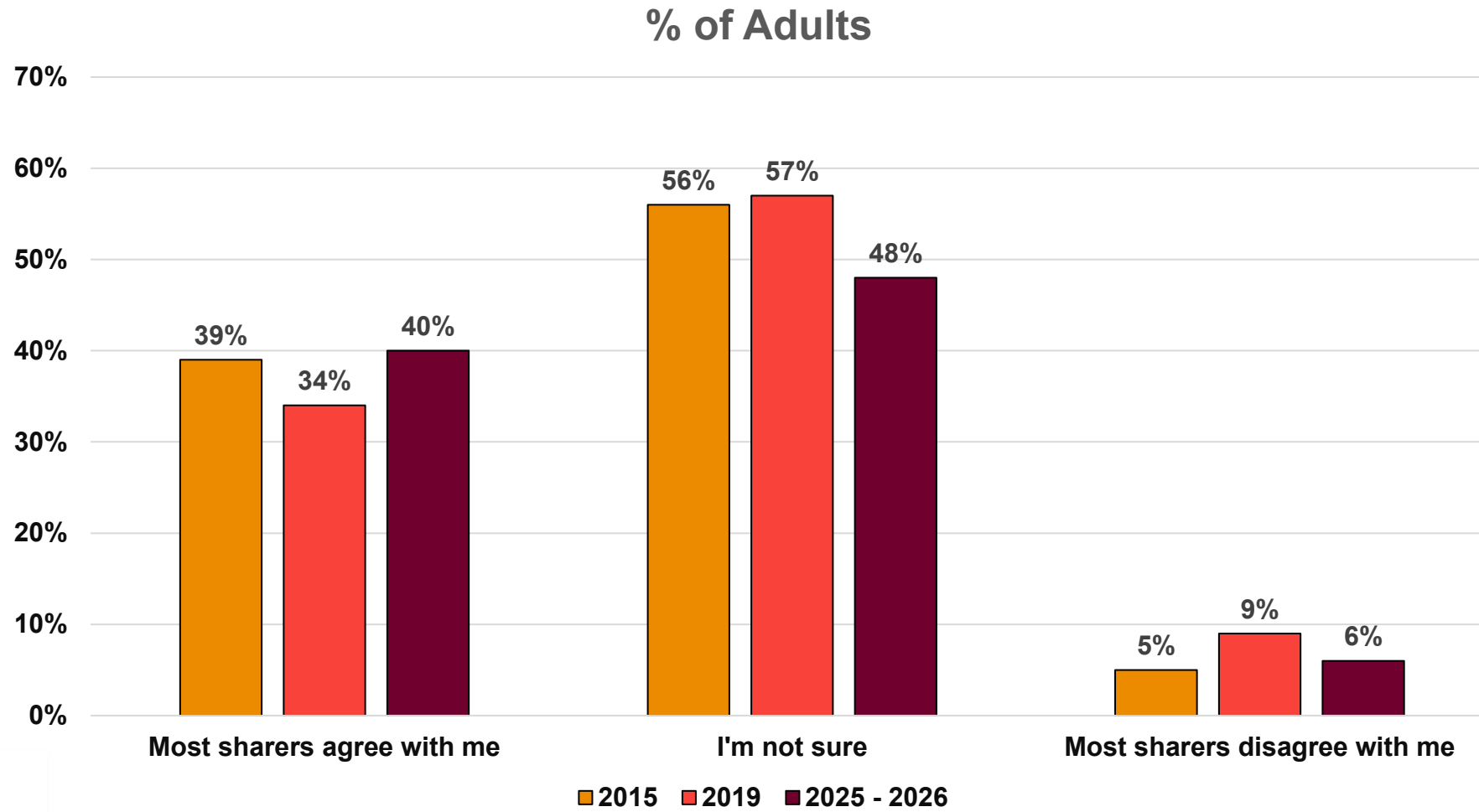
31% of U.S. adults share news on the internet for any purpose (Reuters Institute February 2025)

If you shared a news item on the internet, would you say that most of the people who read the item?

% Among those who share news items

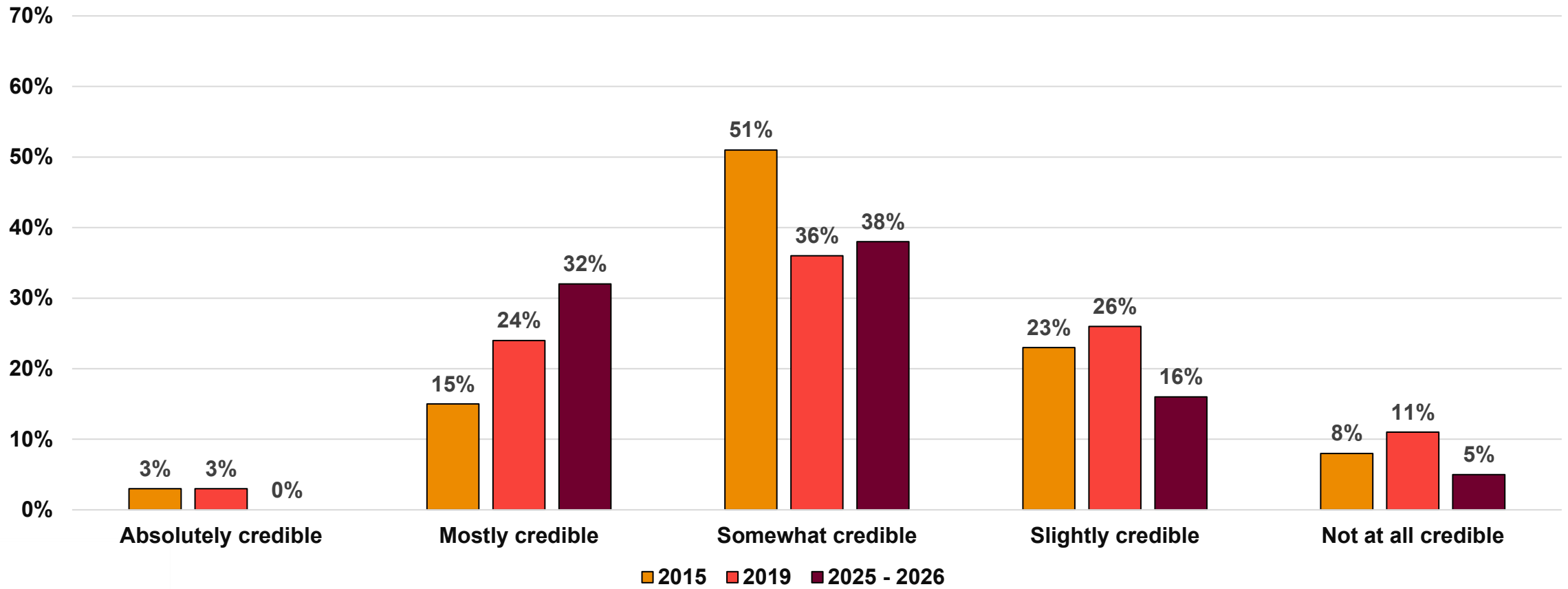


When you read a news item that someone else has shared with you on the internet, would you say?

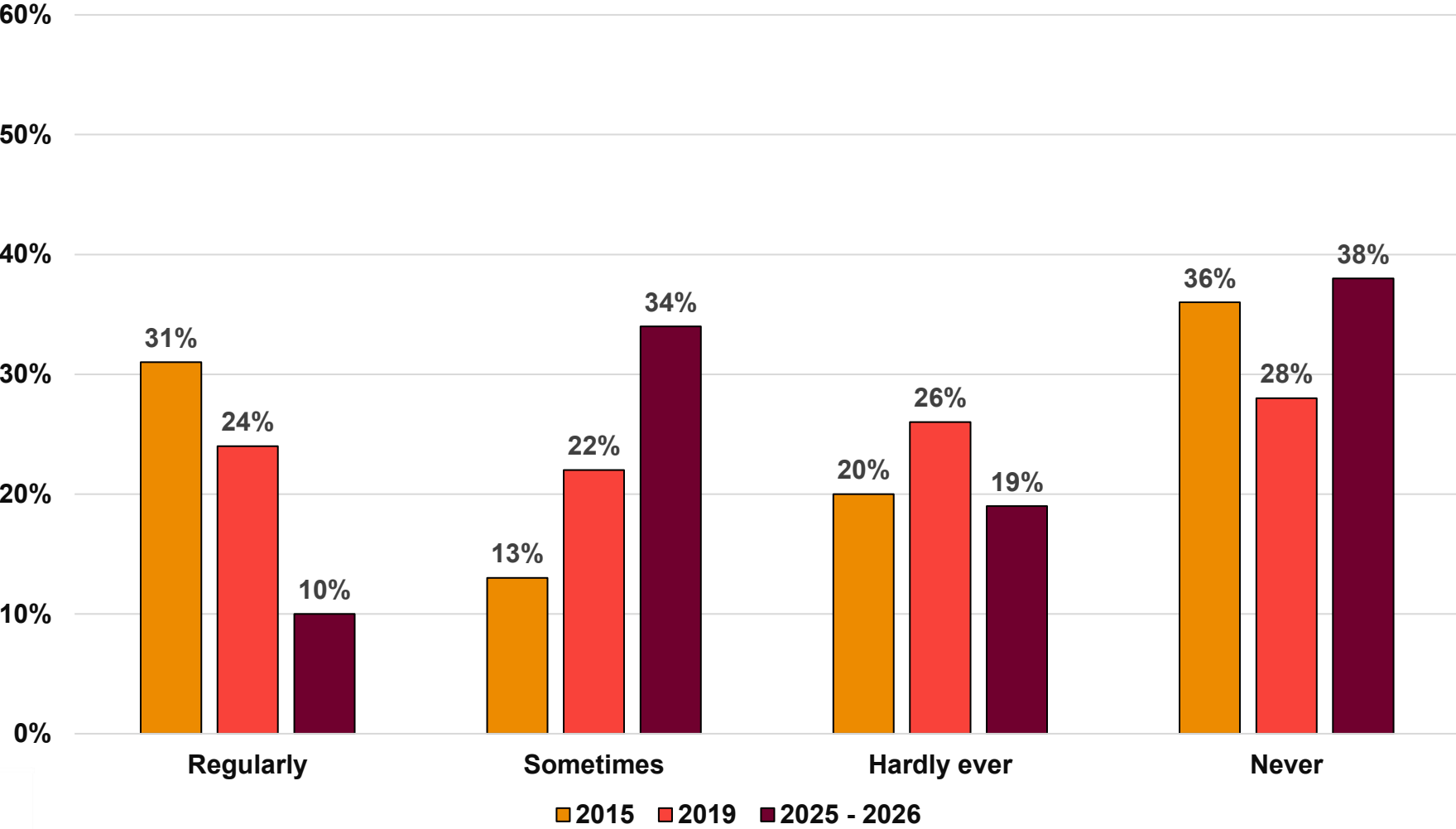


When you read a news item that someone else has shared with you on the internet, would you say that item is?

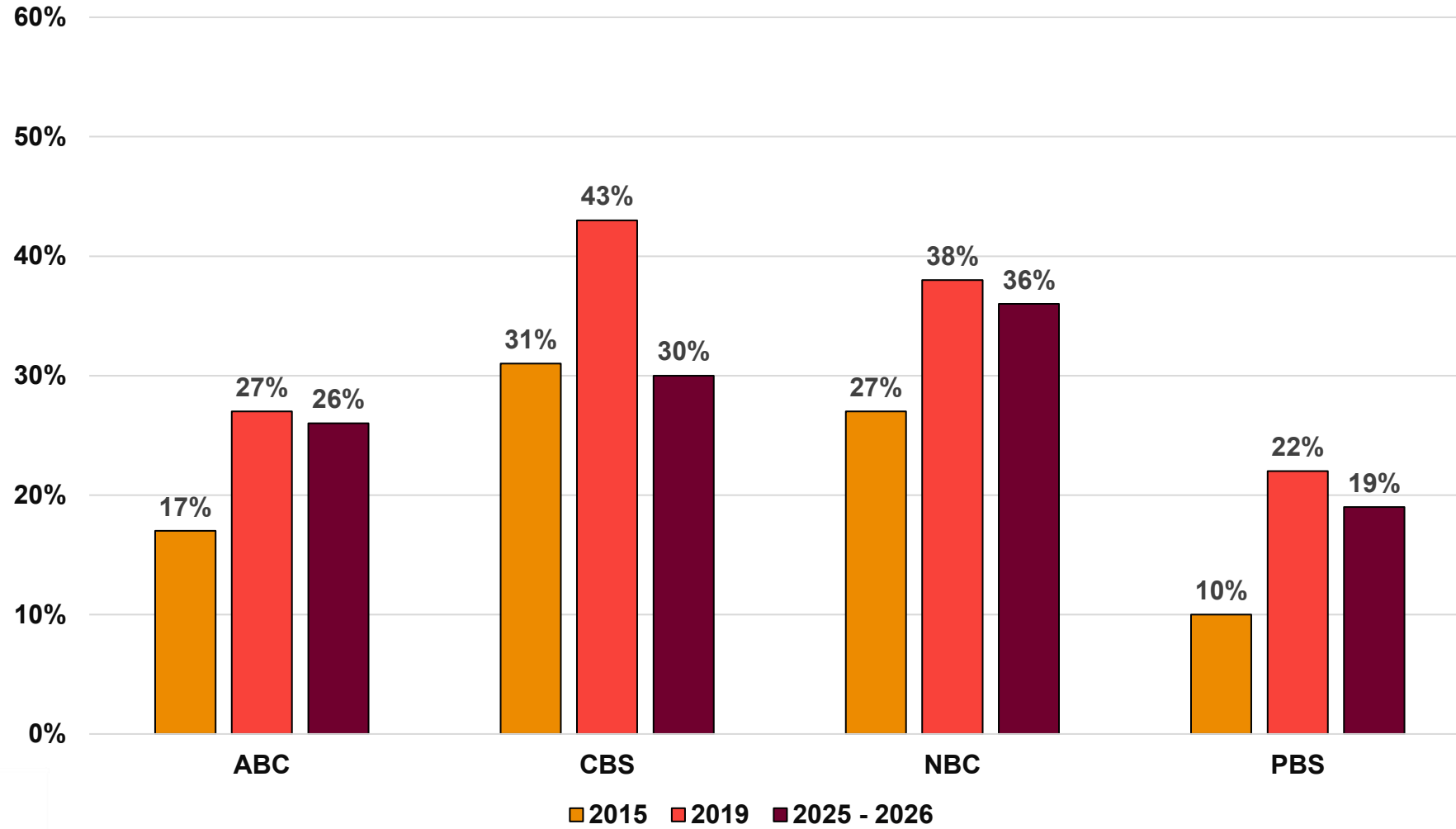
% of Adults



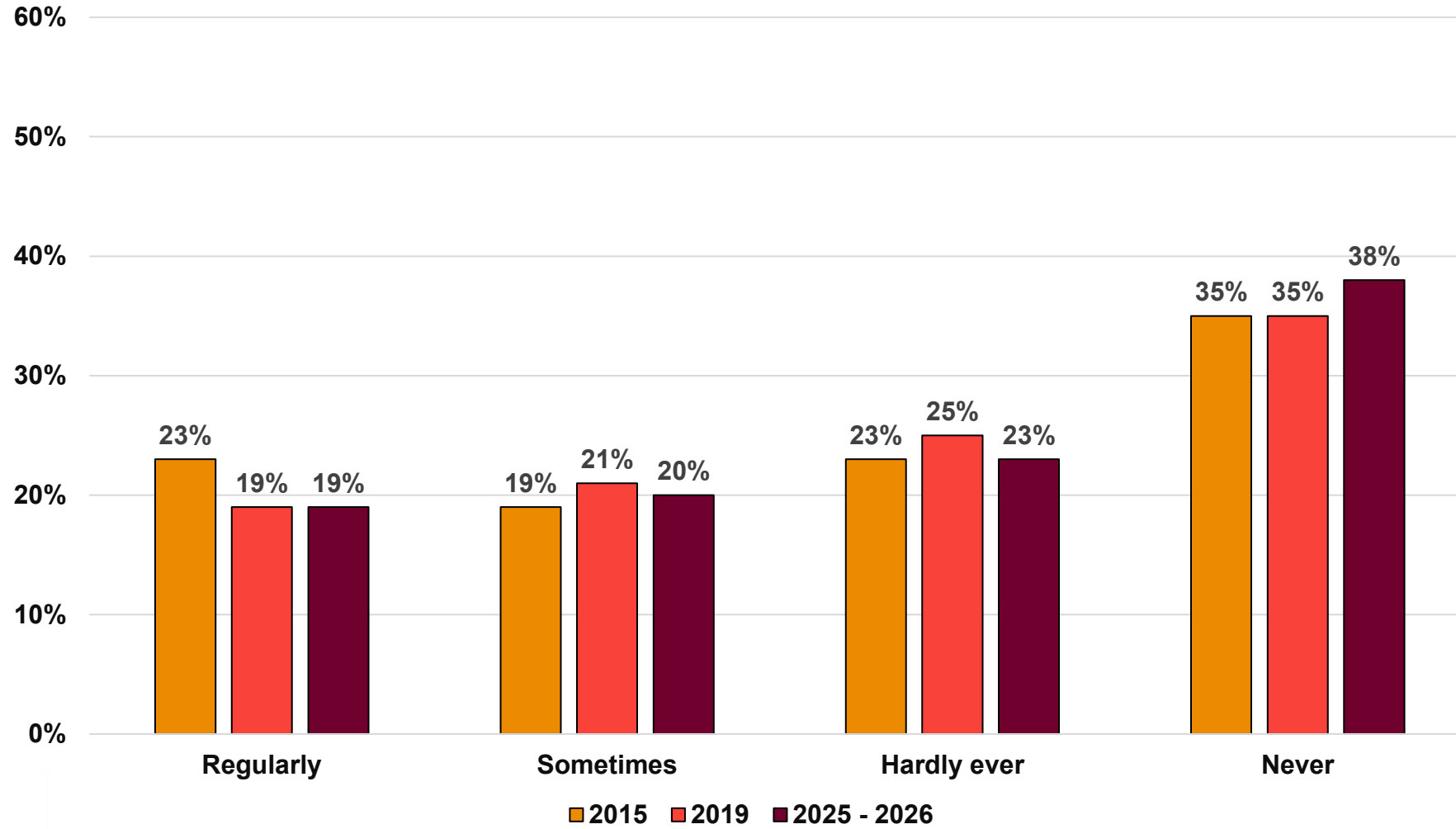
How often do you watch broadcast network TV news on television?



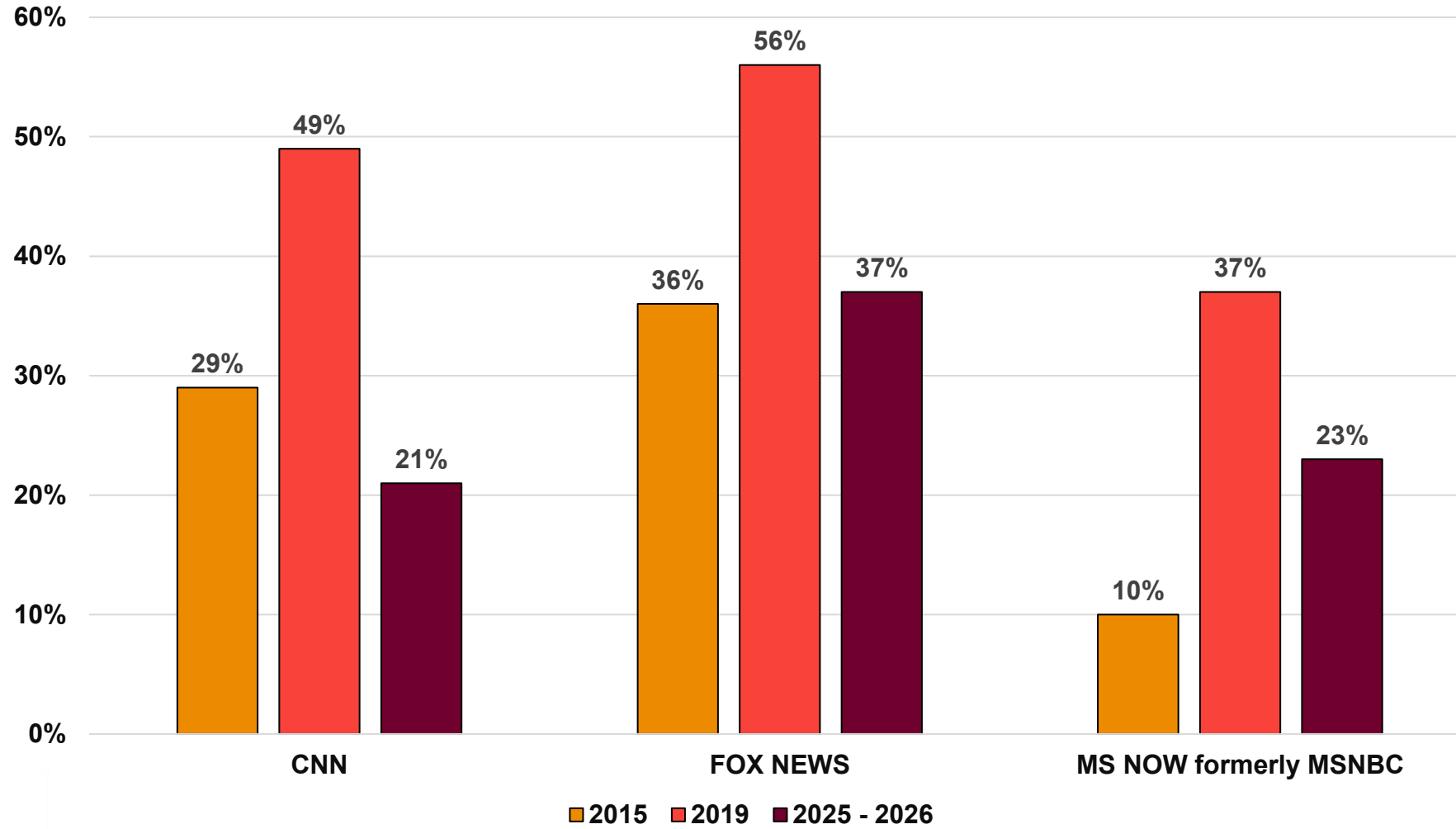
Do you watch any of the following national broadcast network news shows on TV or the internet?



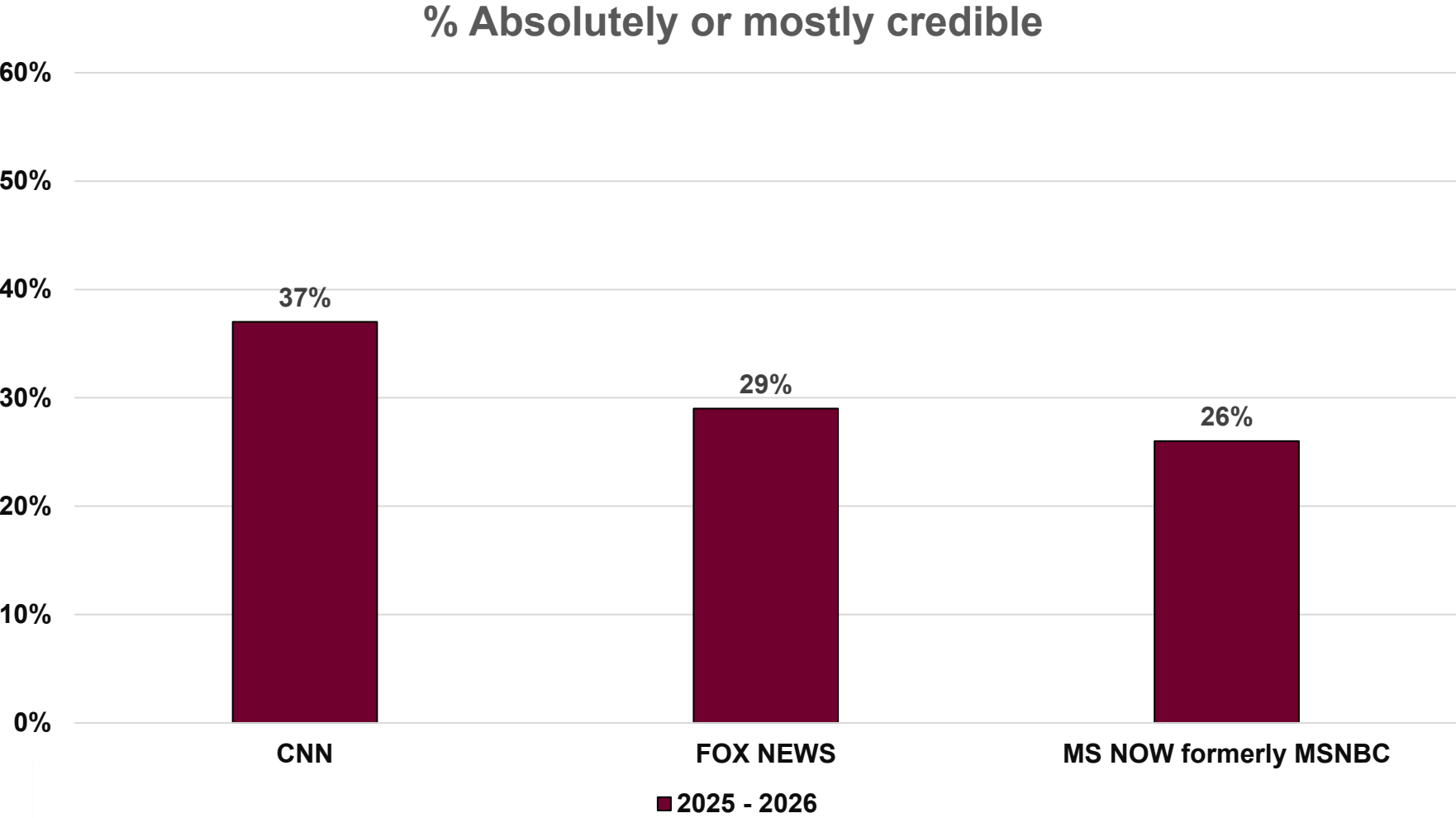
How often do you watch cable TV news on television?



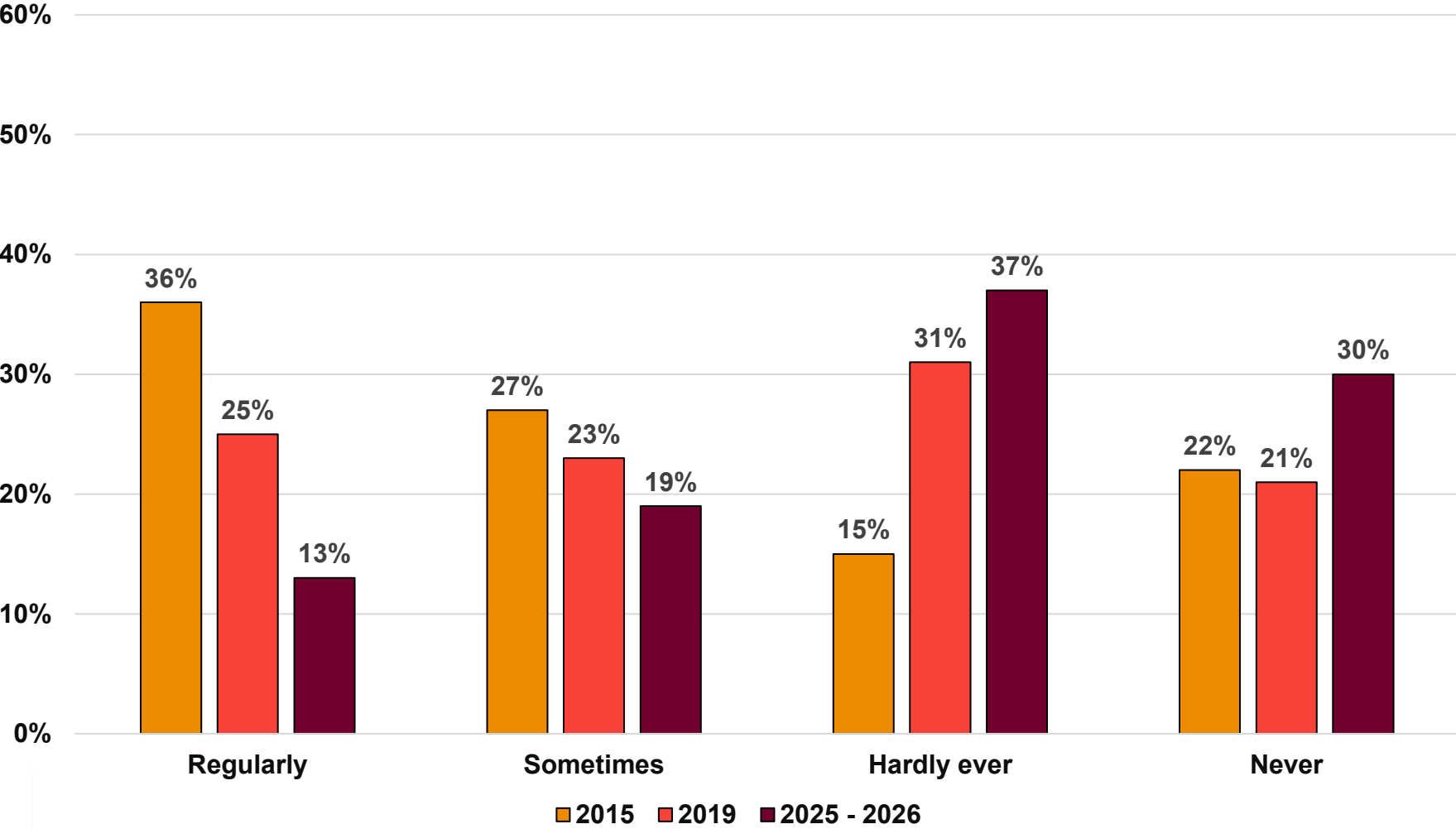
Do you watch any of the following cable news shows on TV or the internet?



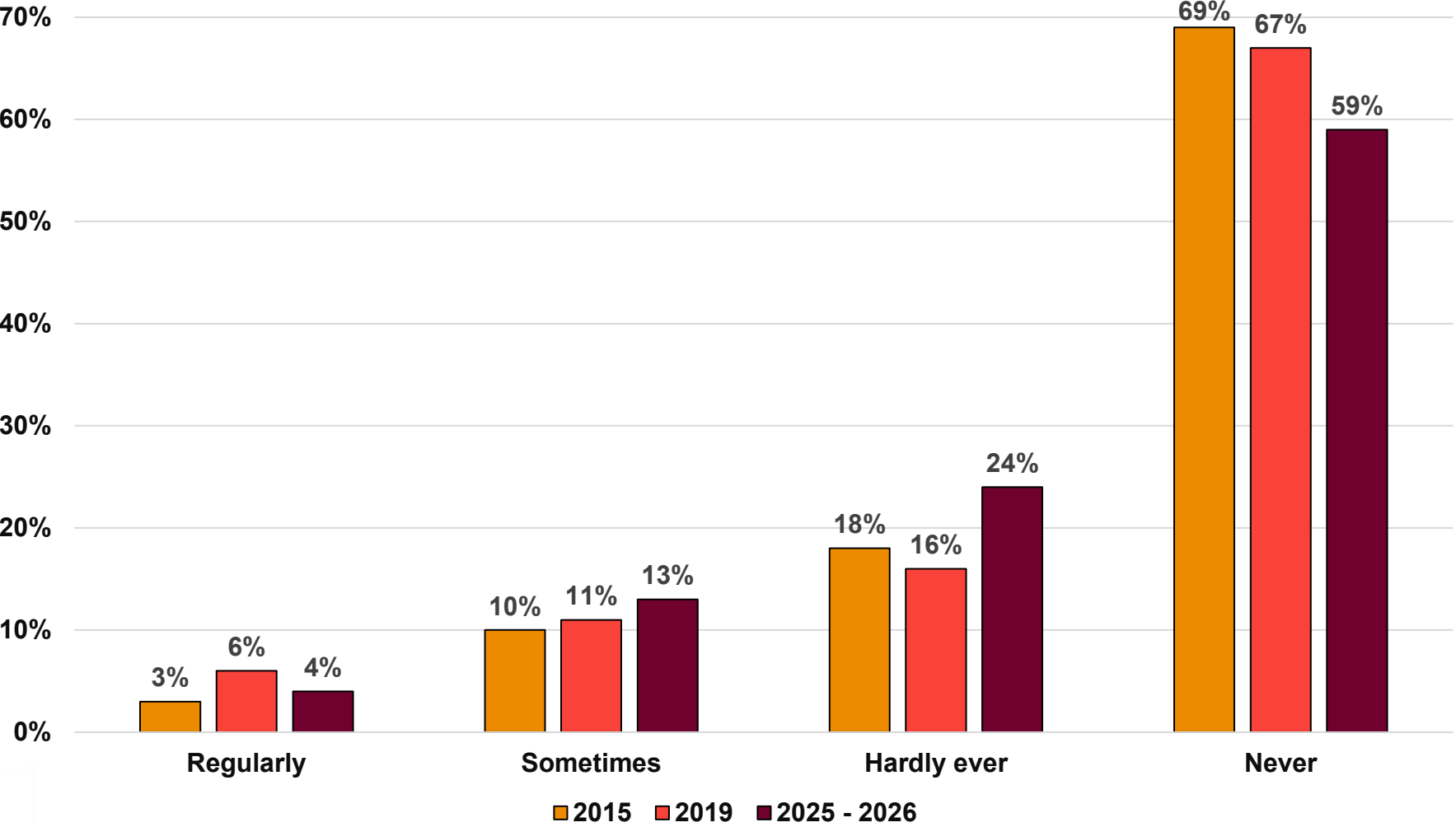
How credible are the following cable news shows?



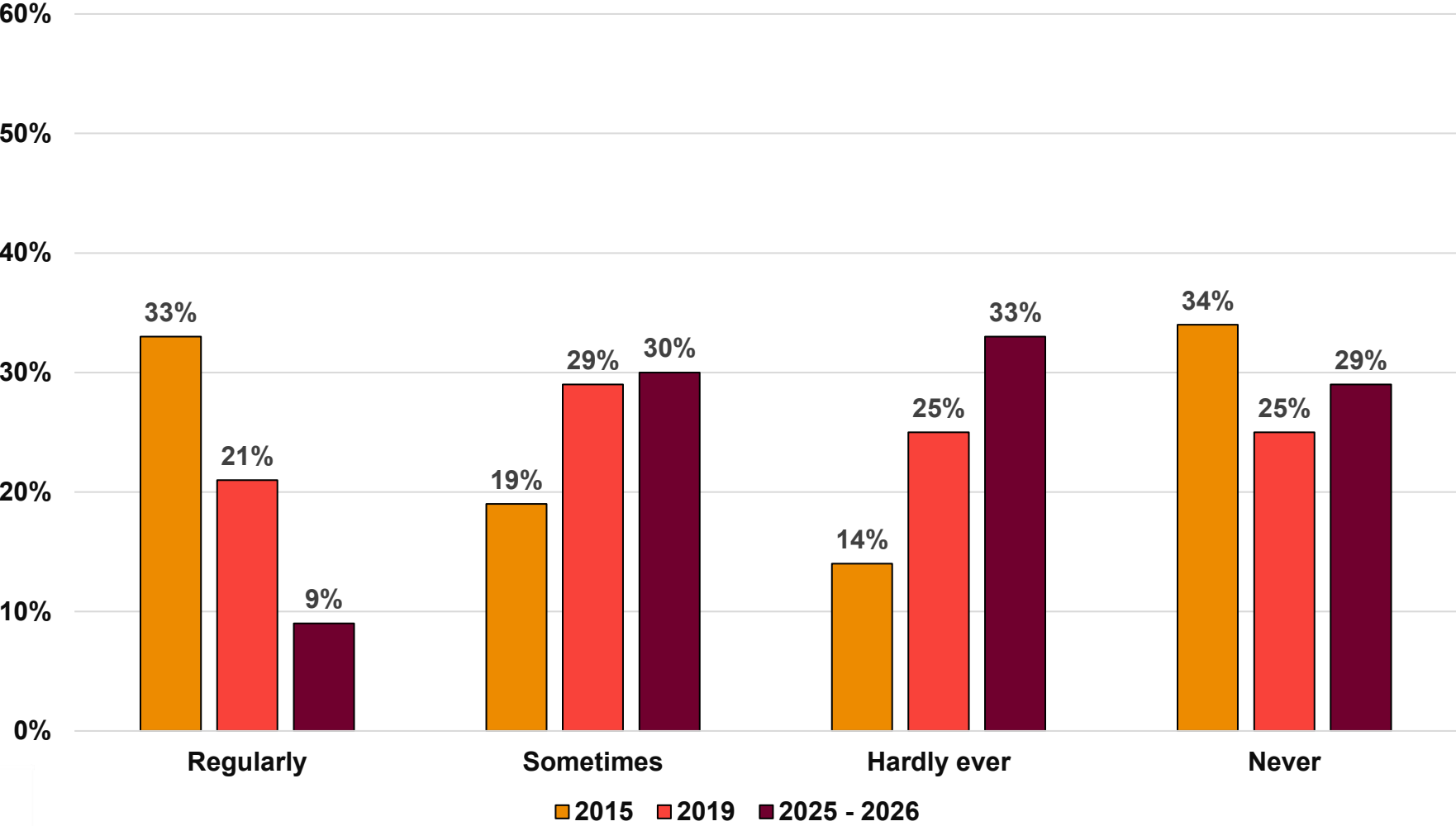
How often do you read a Montana daily newspaper in print or on the internet?



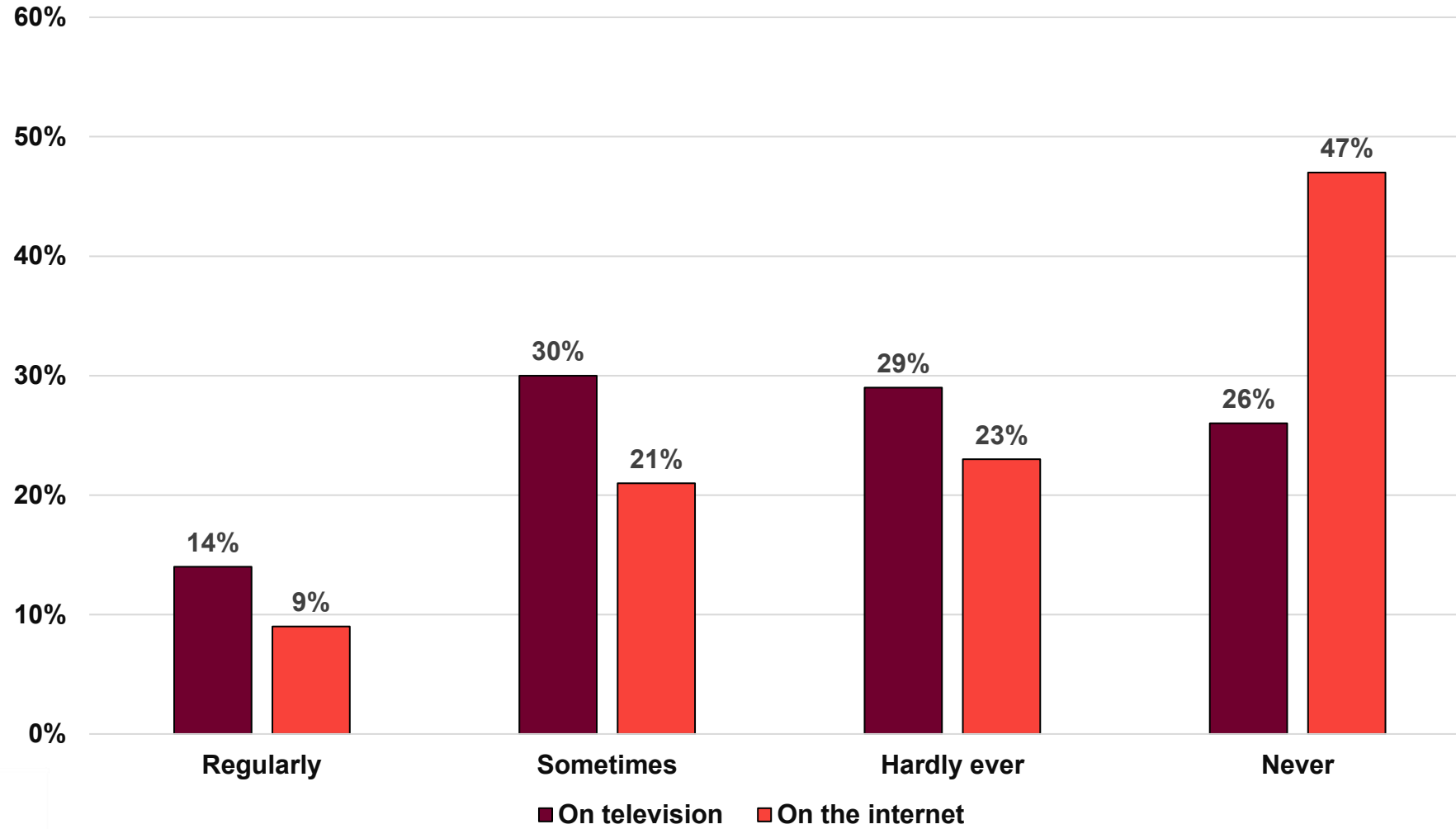
How often do you read a national daily newspaper in print or on the internet?



How often do you read a local weekly newspaper in print or on the internet?

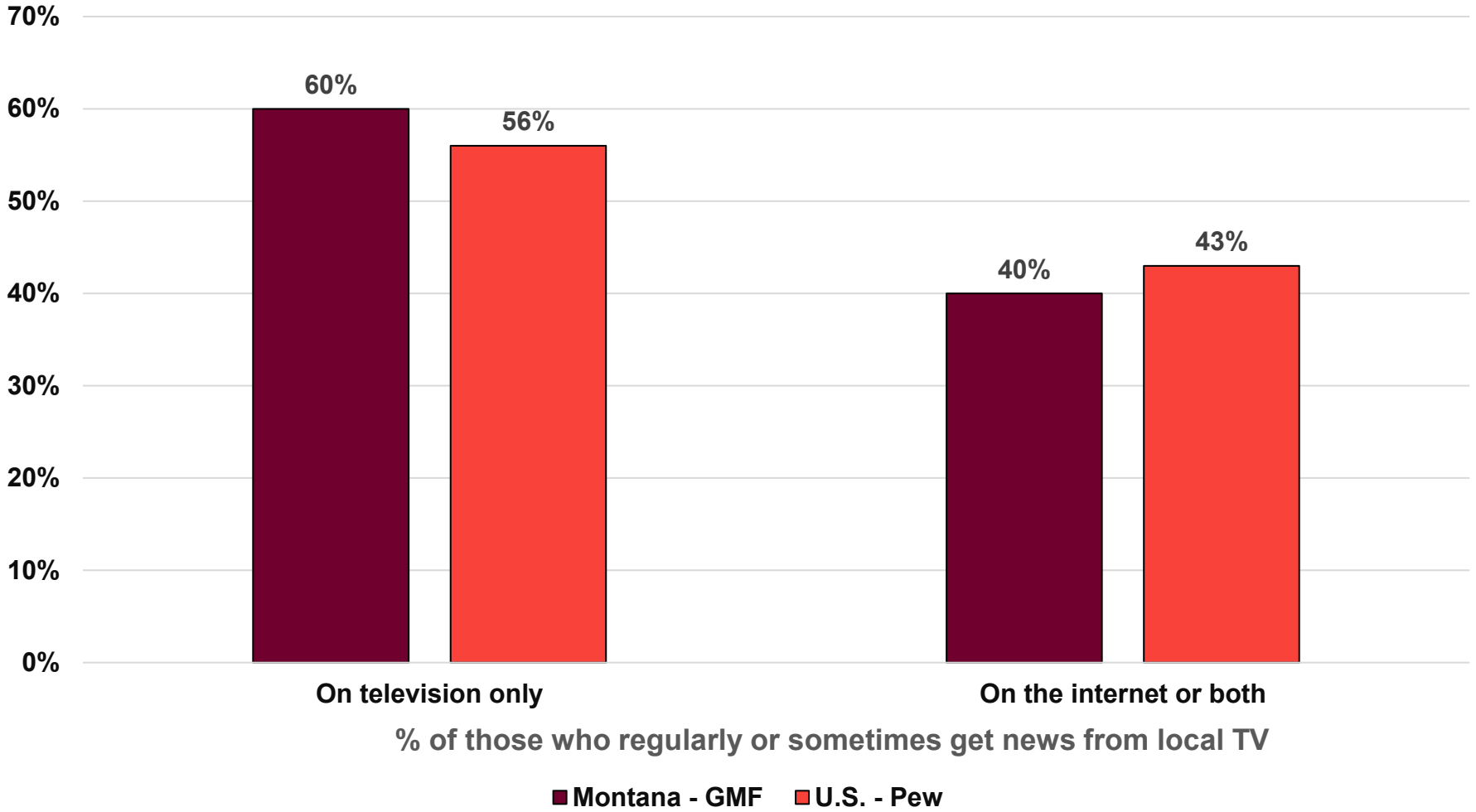


How often do you watch local TV news in 2025 (broadcast TV versus internet)?



Comparison with Pew Research Center December 2025

How adults access local TV news



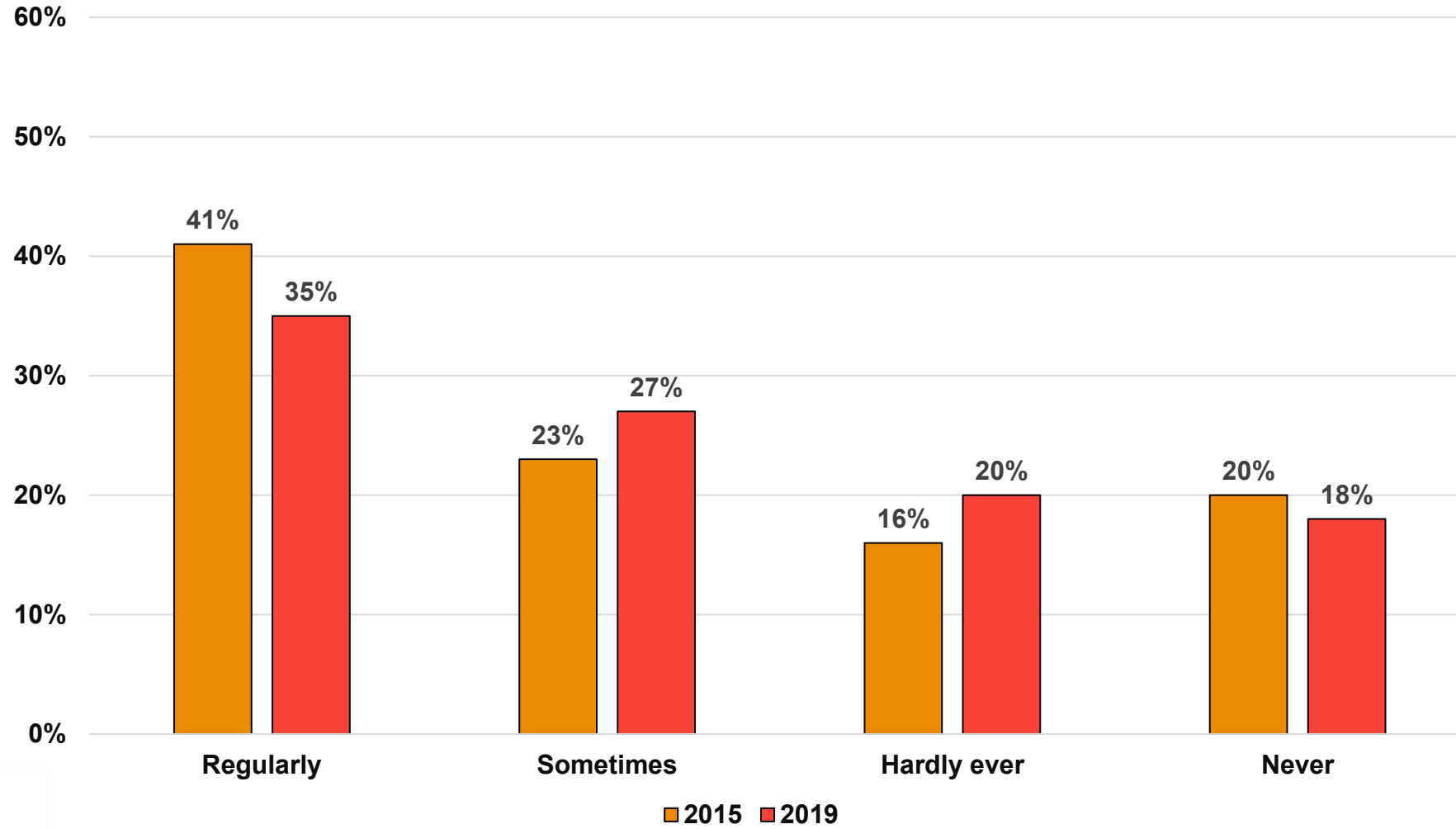
% of those who regularly or sometimes get news from local TV

■ Montana - GMF ■ U.S. - Pew

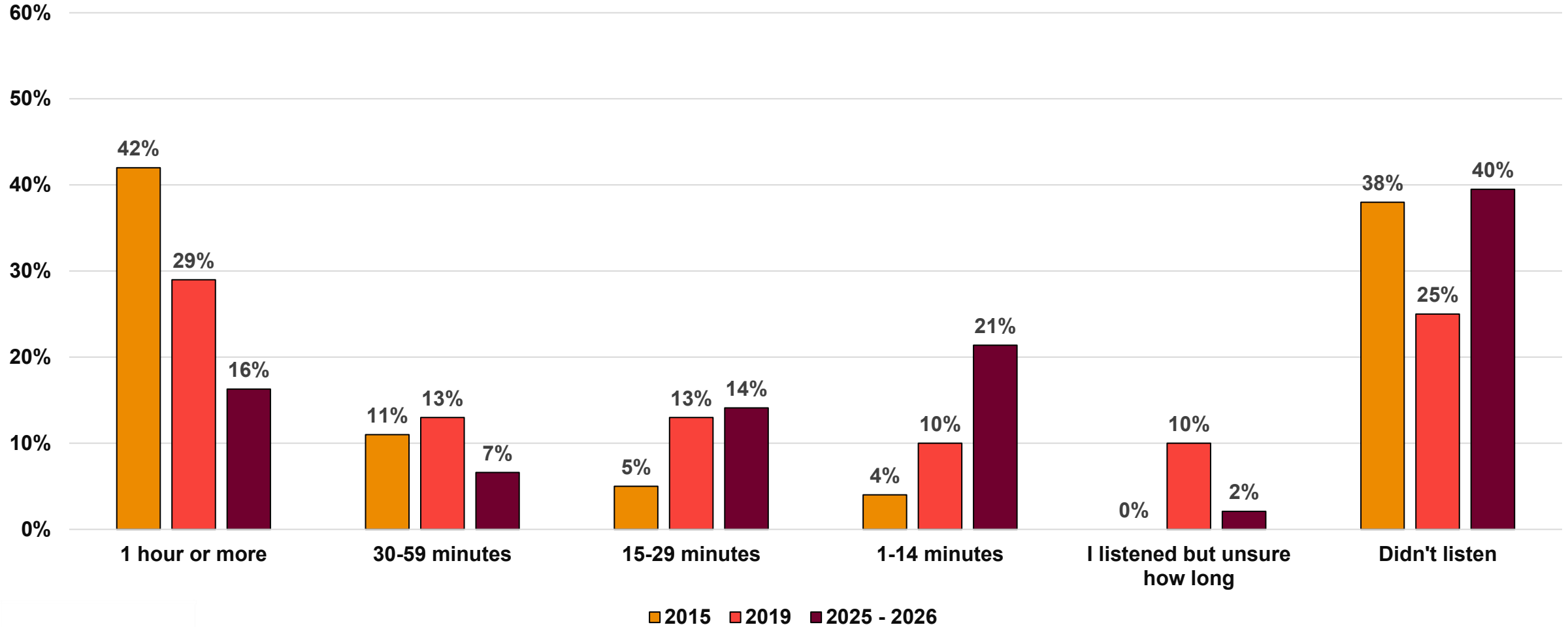
Note: survey question differences may account for some of the differences reported above.



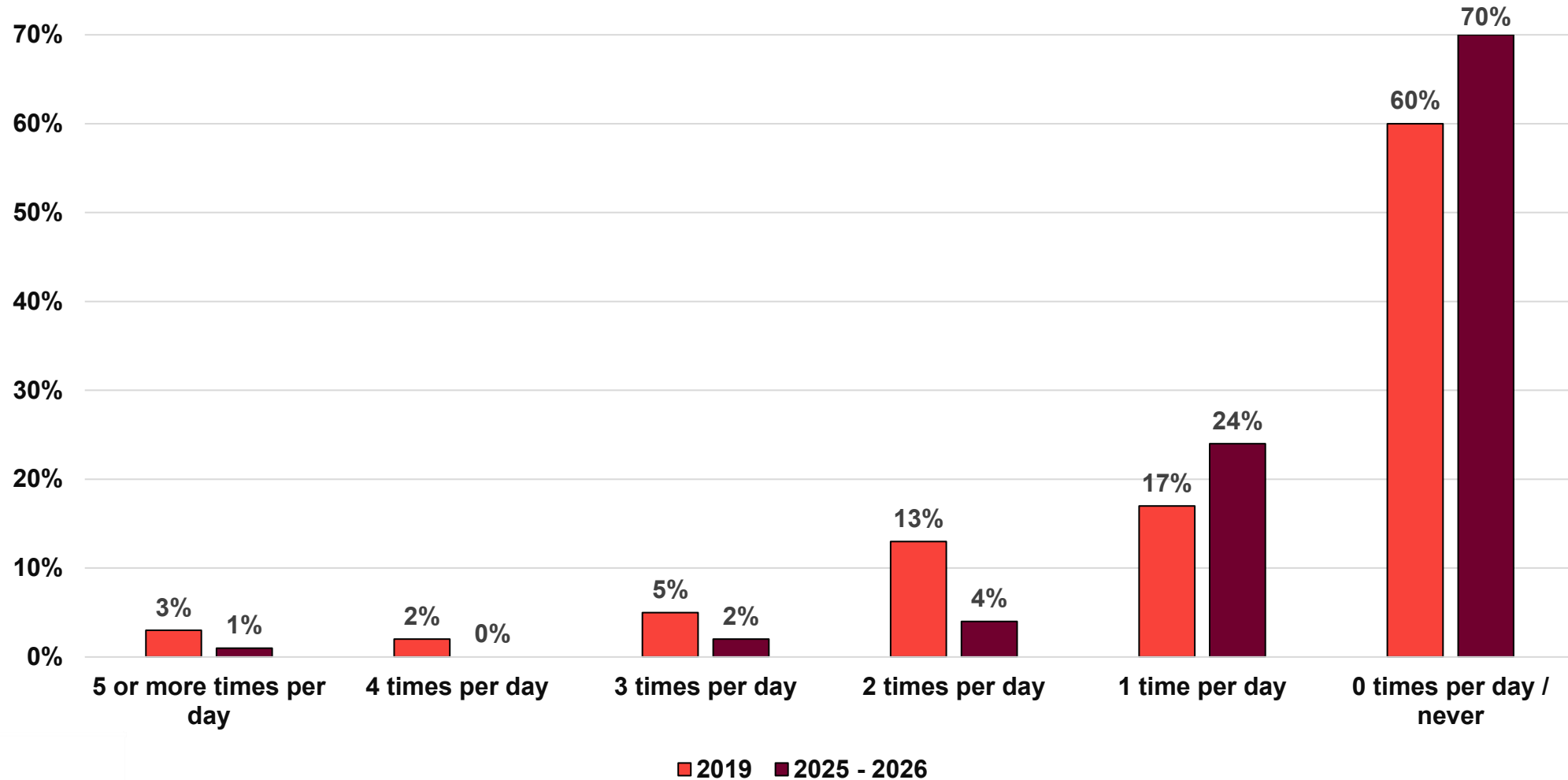
How often do you watch local TV news in 2019 and 2015 (all platforms)?



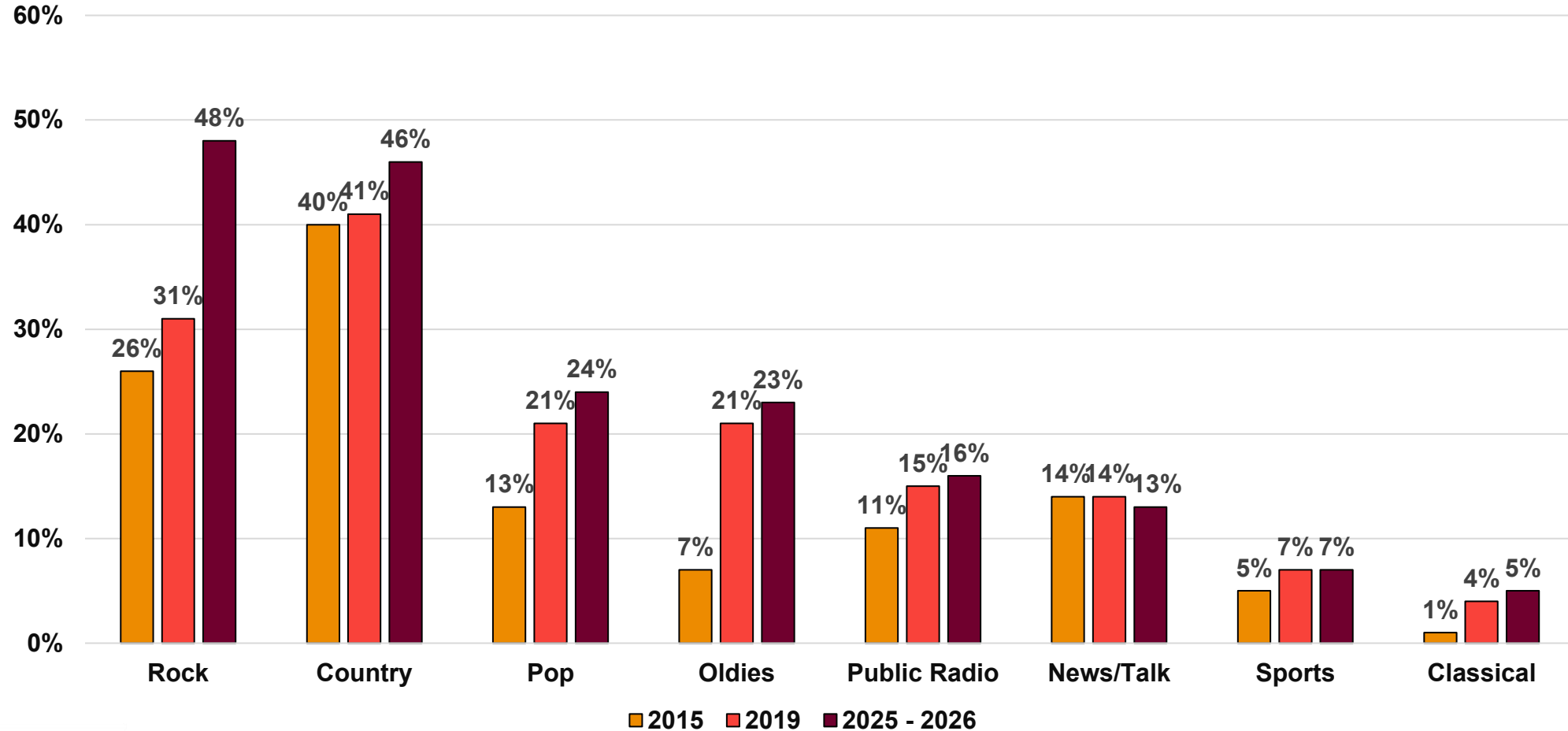
About how much time, if any, did you spend listening to the radio yesterday?



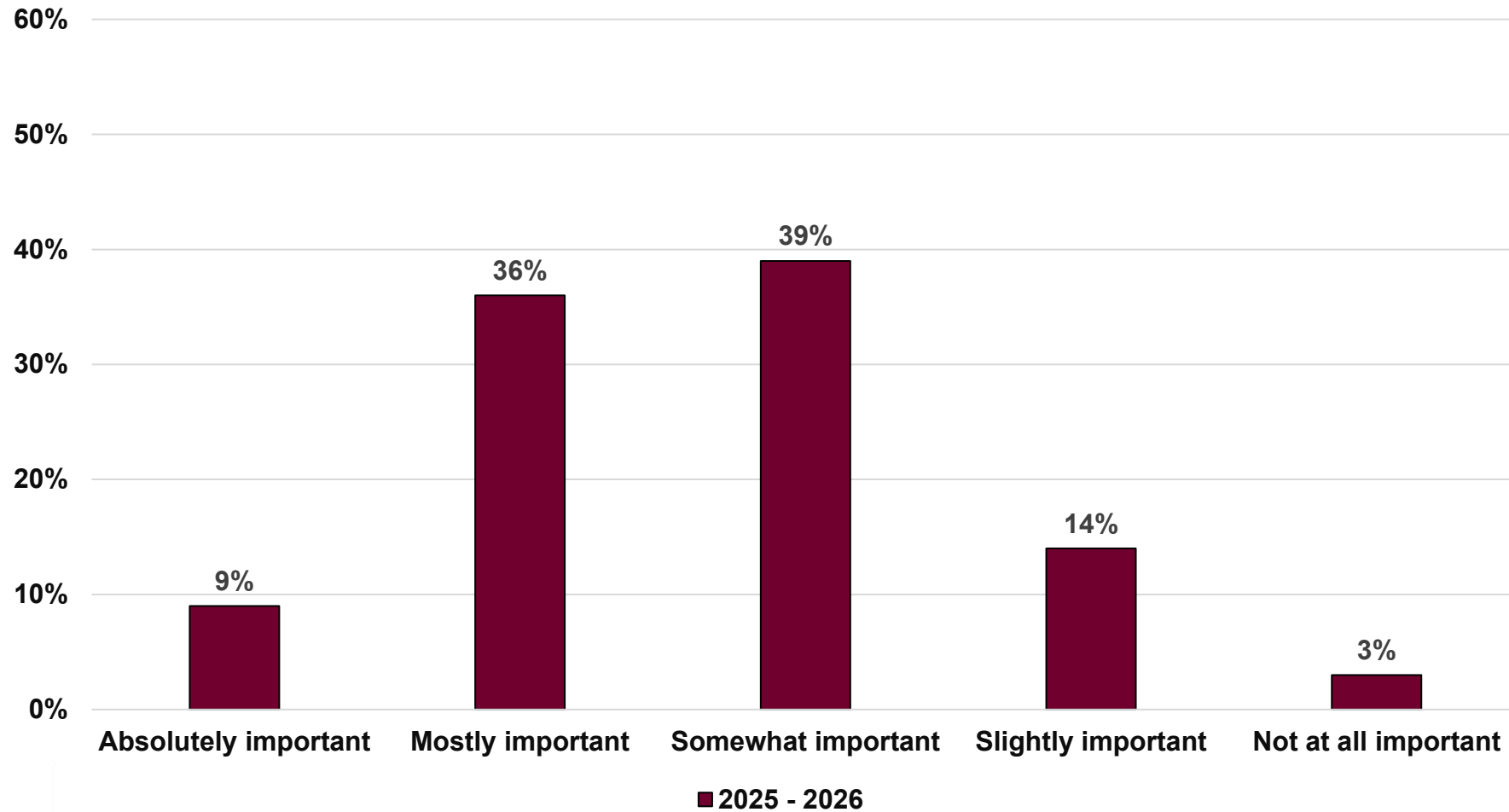
How many times per day do you tune in to the radio just to get news?



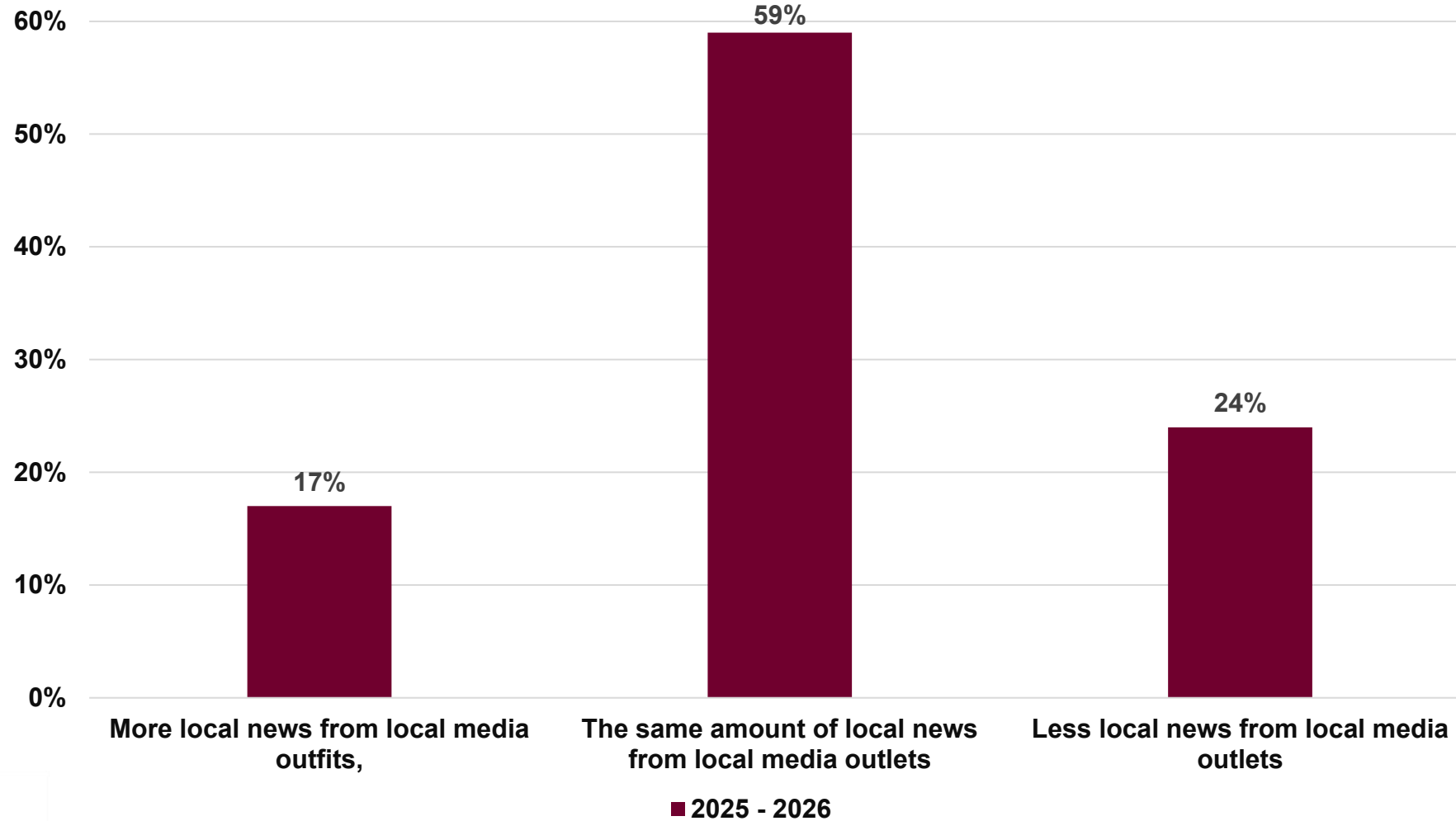
What one or two types of radio stations would you say you listen to most?



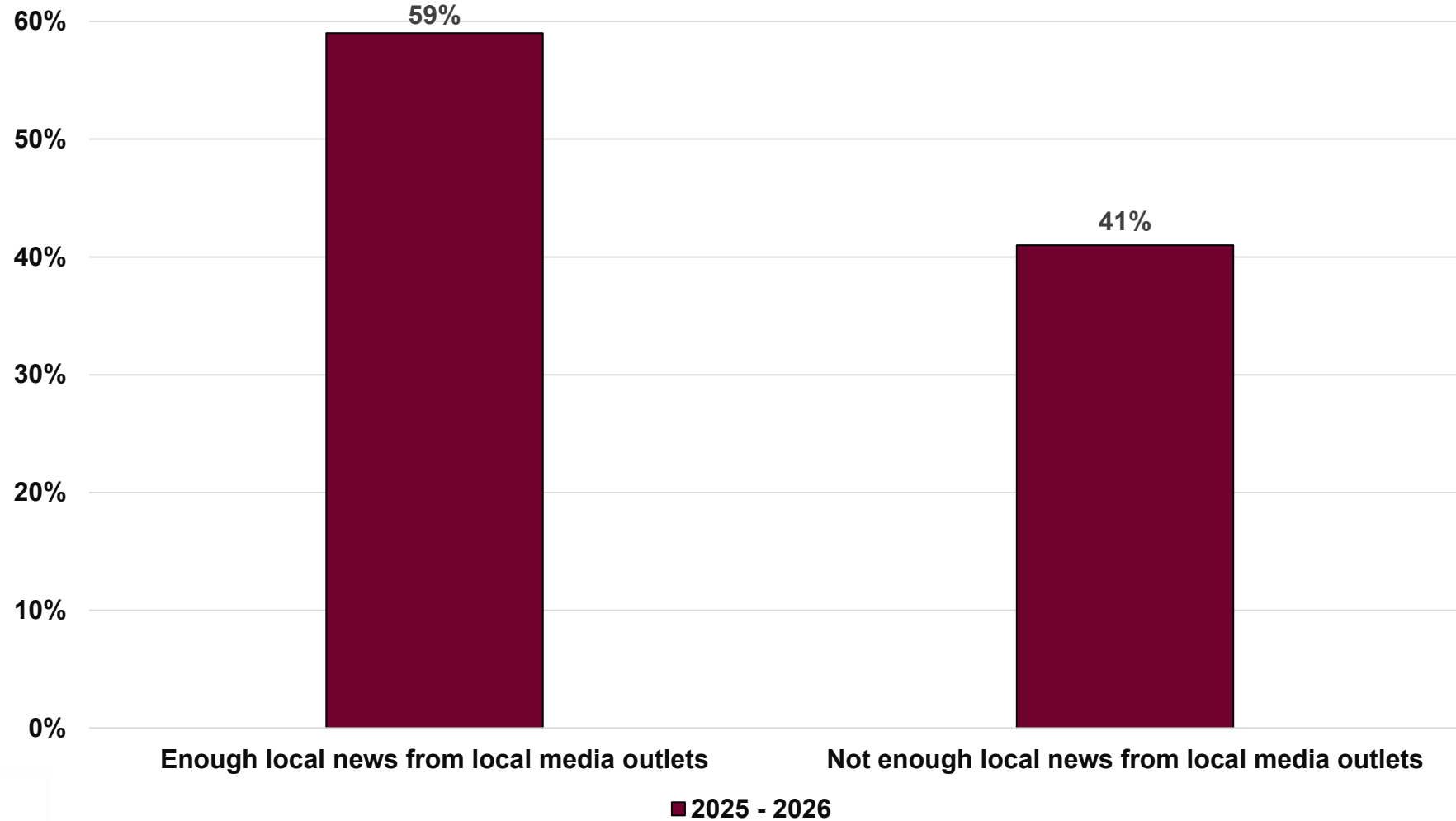
How important is local news to you and your family?



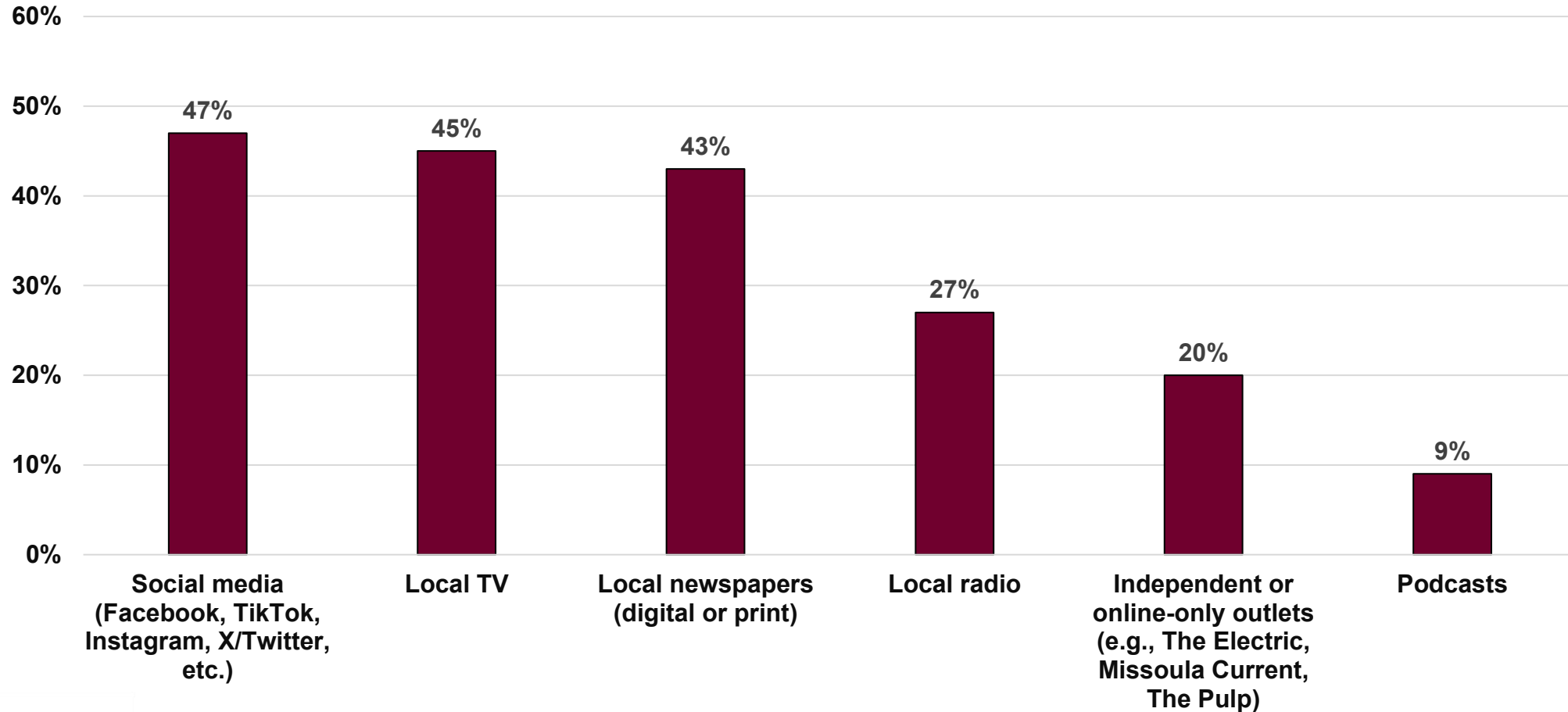
Compared to the past, are you receiving?



Overall, are you currently receiving?



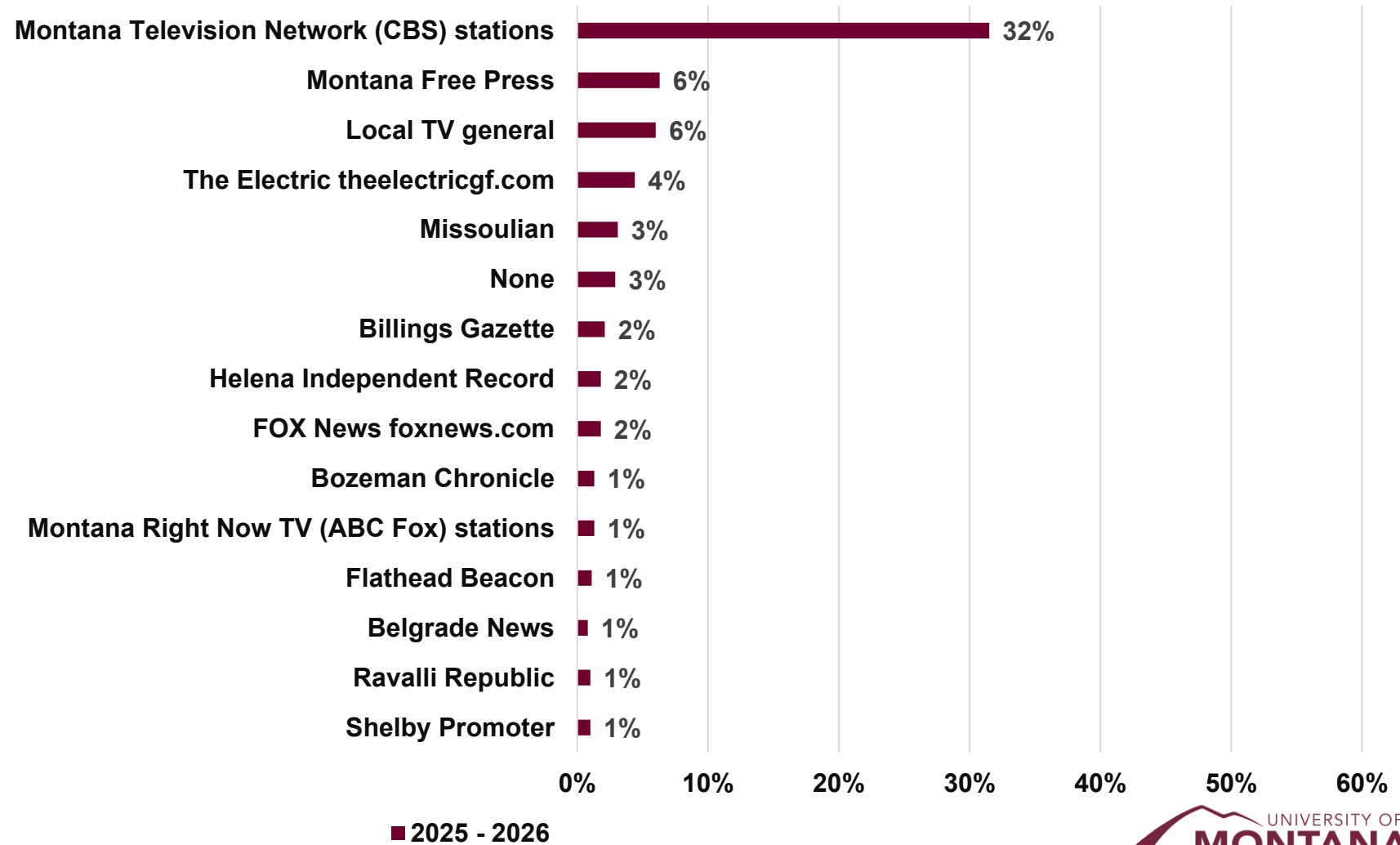
Where do you most often get your local news and information?



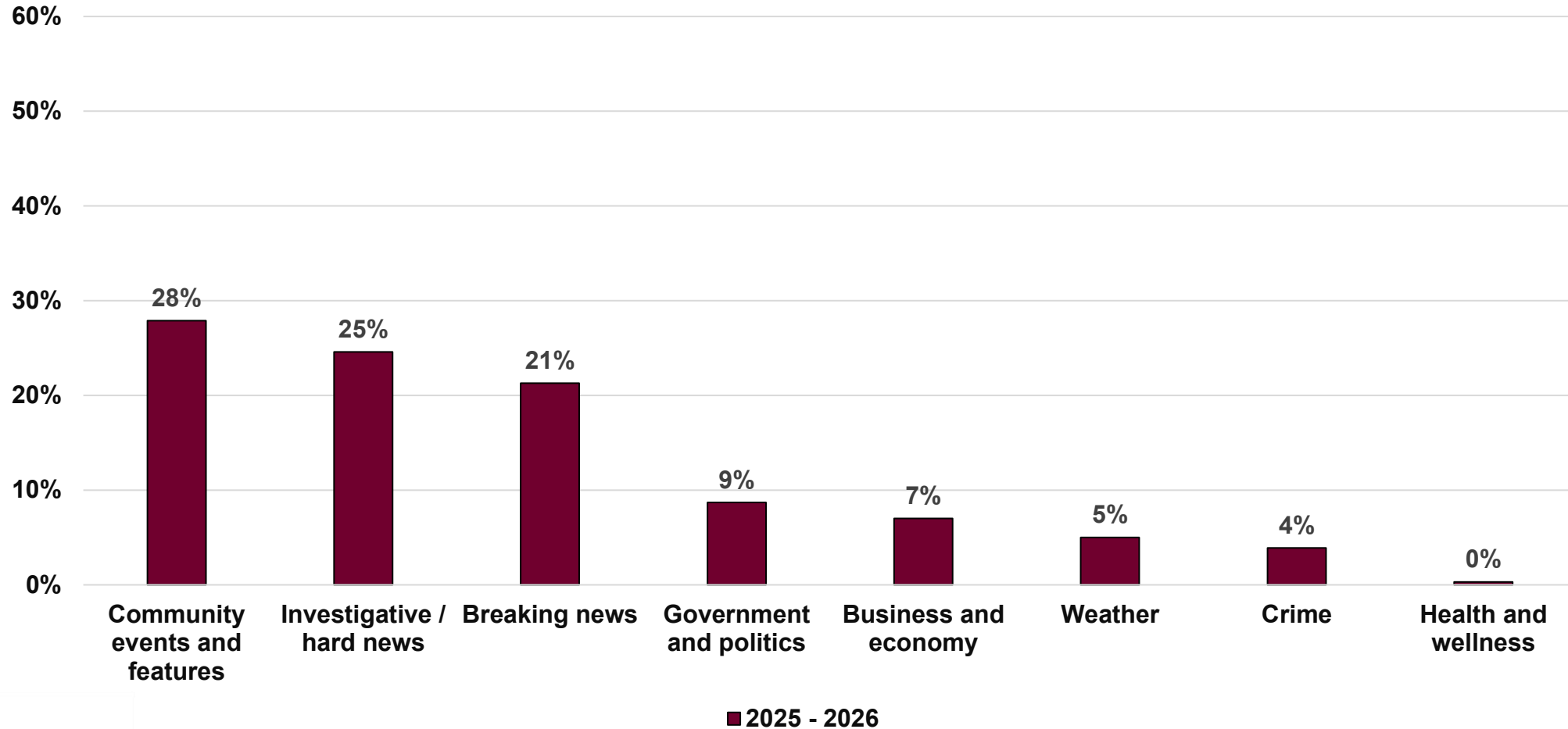
■ 2025 - 2026

What specific local news source do you consider the most trusted source of information?

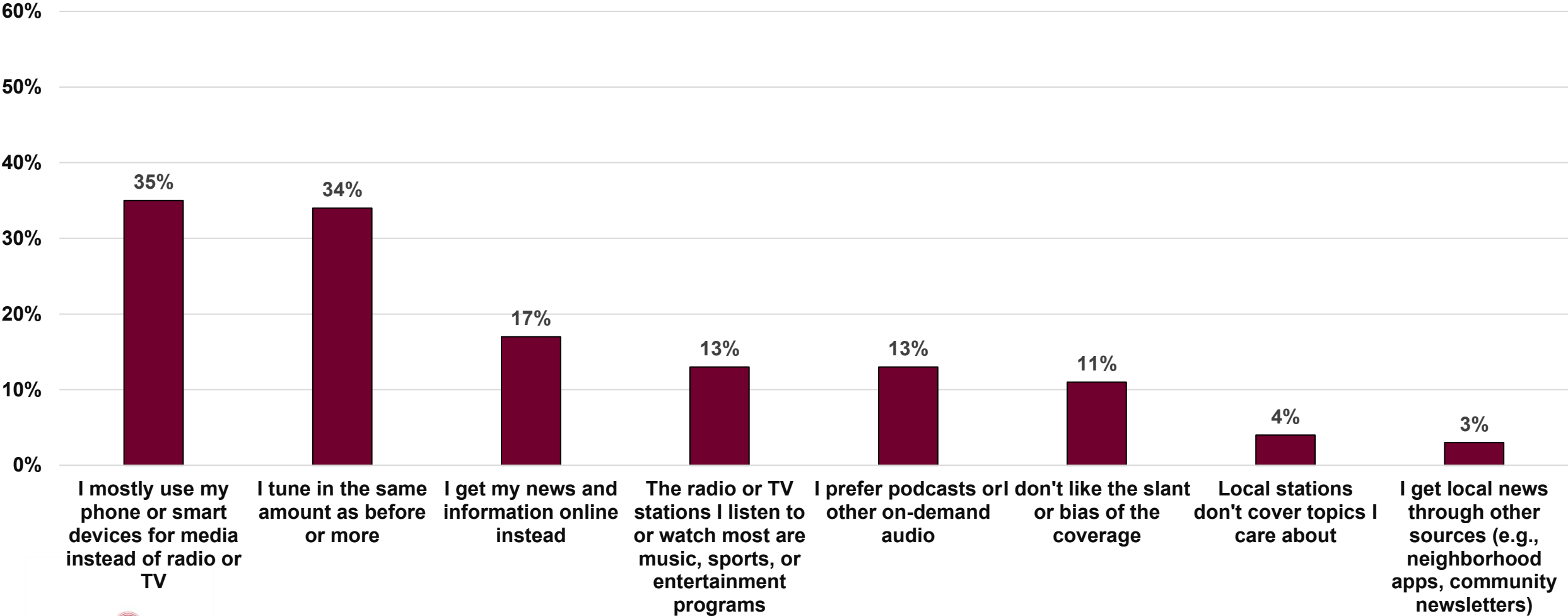
Top answers to an open-ended question



What type of local news coverage would you most like to see more of?

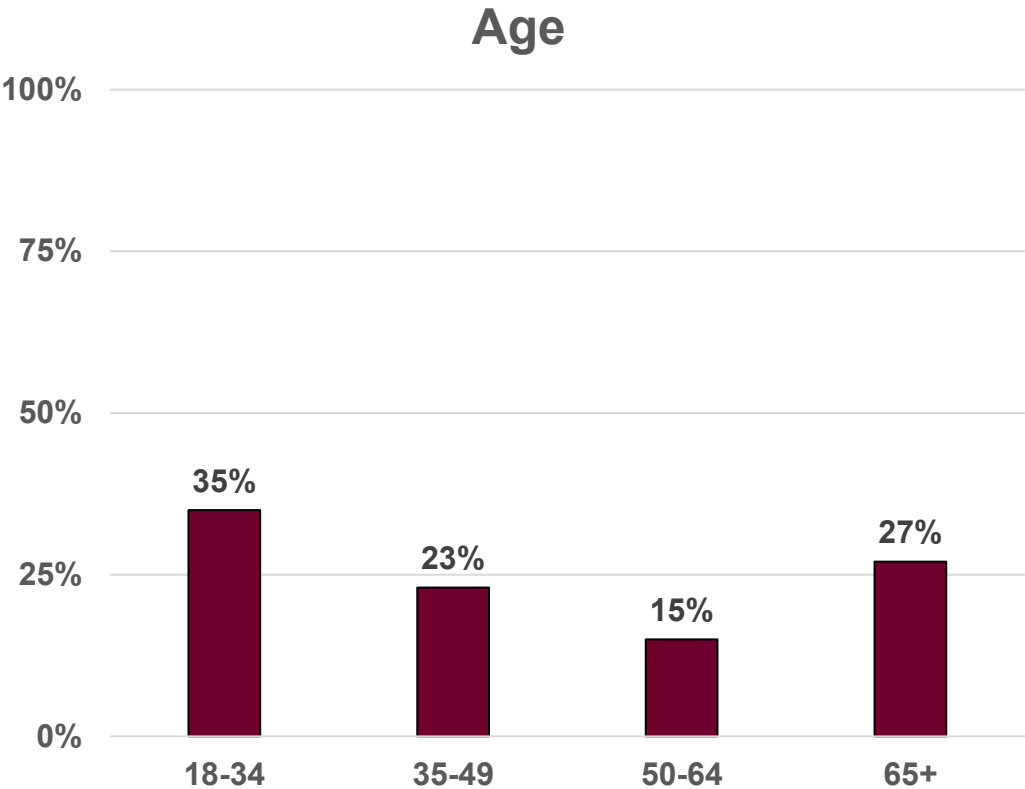
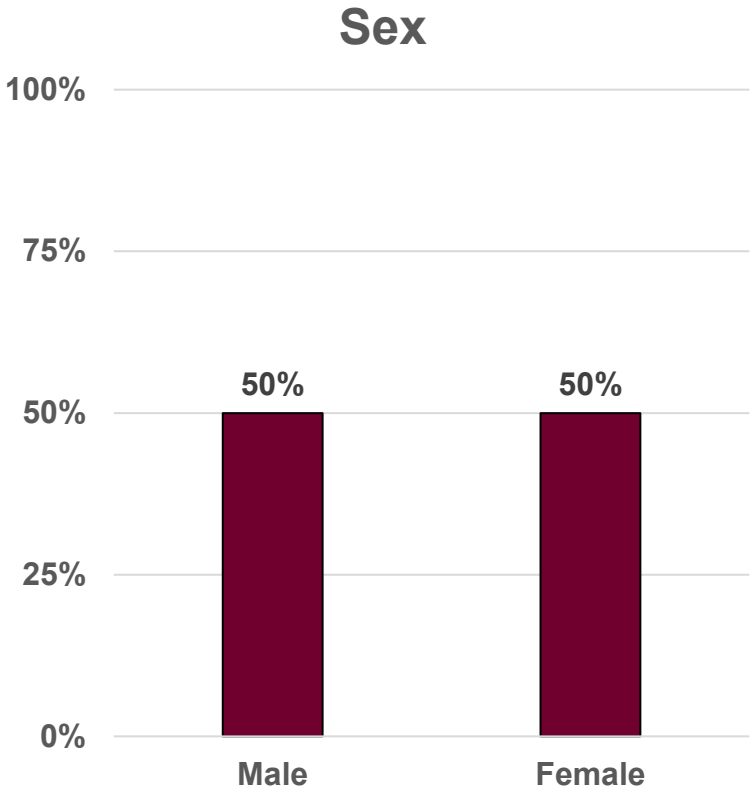


If you tune into local TV or radio broadcasters less often than you once did, why is that?



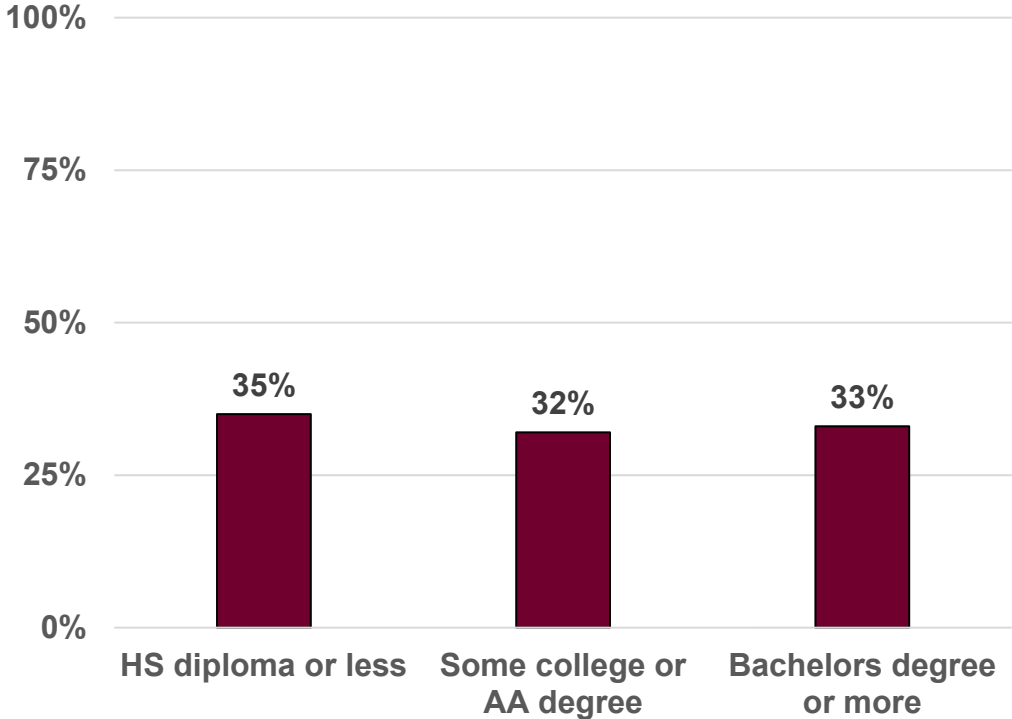
■ 2025 - 2026

Demographics - 1

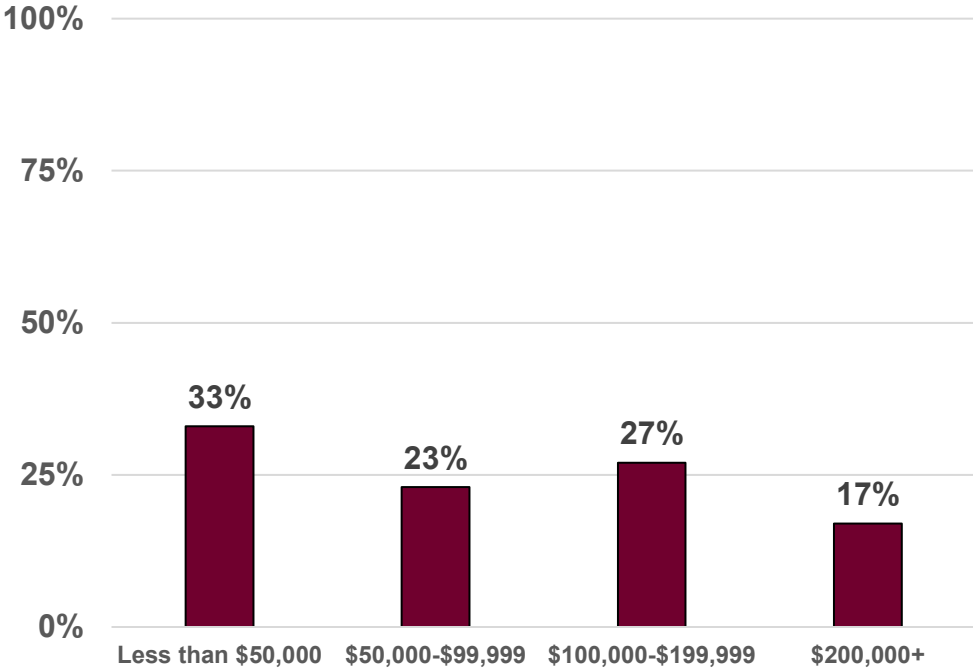


Demographics - 2

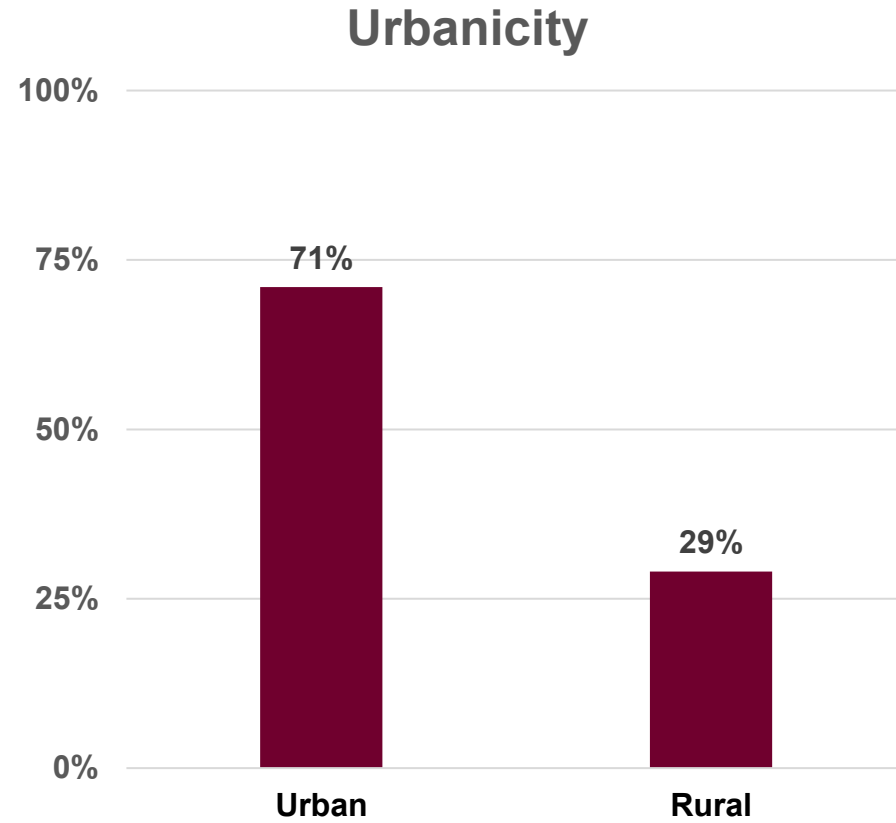
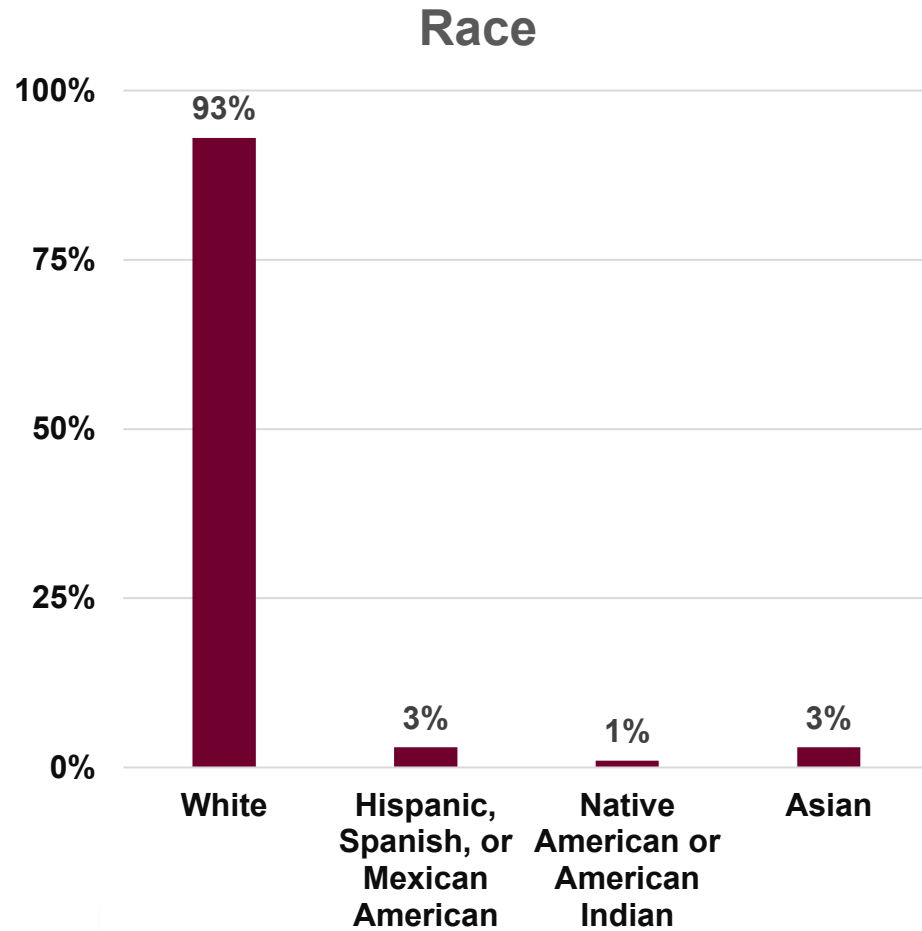
Educational attainment



Household income

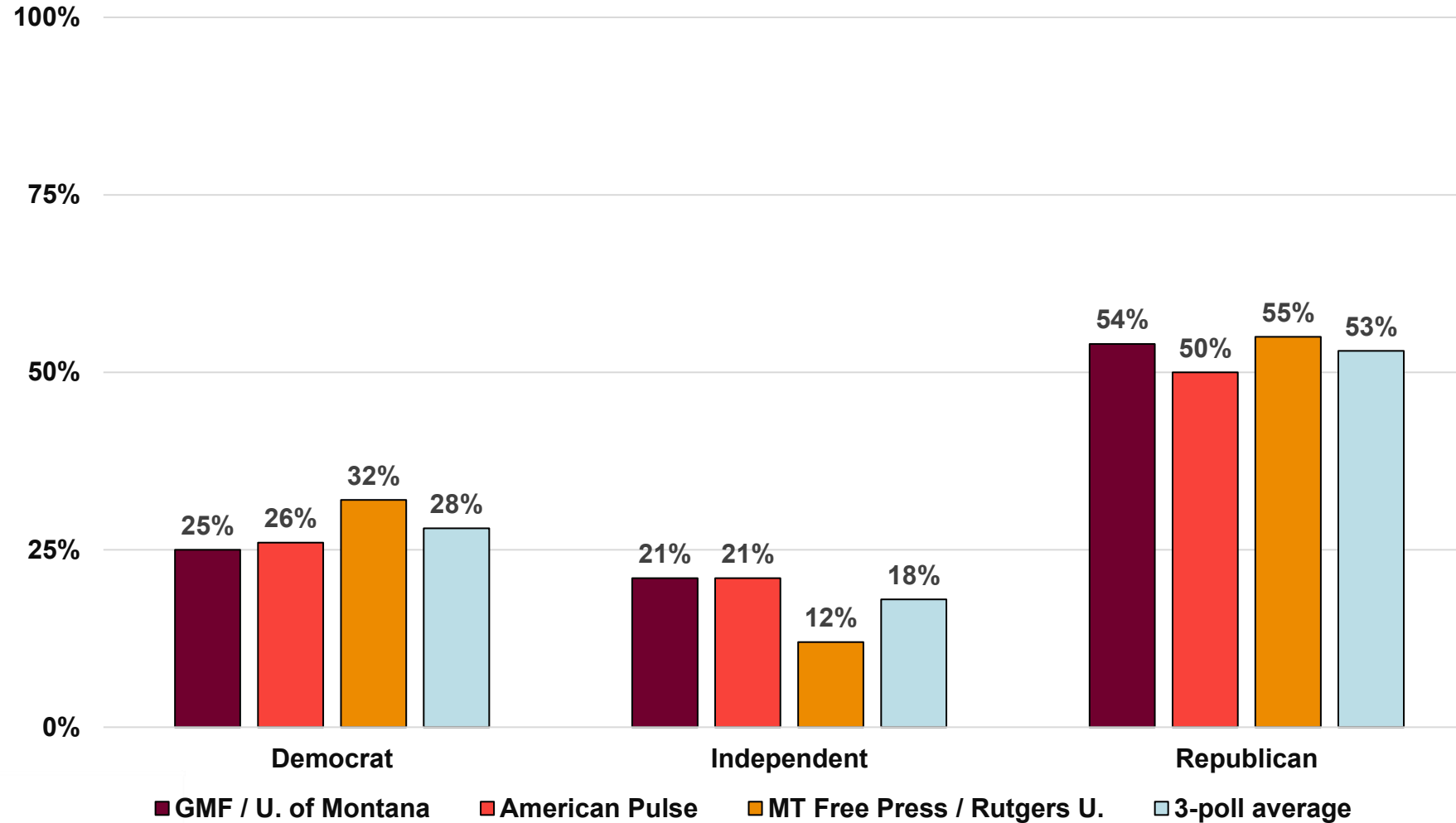


Demographics - 3



Urban = Cascade, Flathead, Gallatin, Lewis and Clark, Missoula, Silver Bow, and Yellowstone counties.
Rural = all other counties.

Montana Political Party Identification with Leaners: 3 Recent Polls



Poll Details:

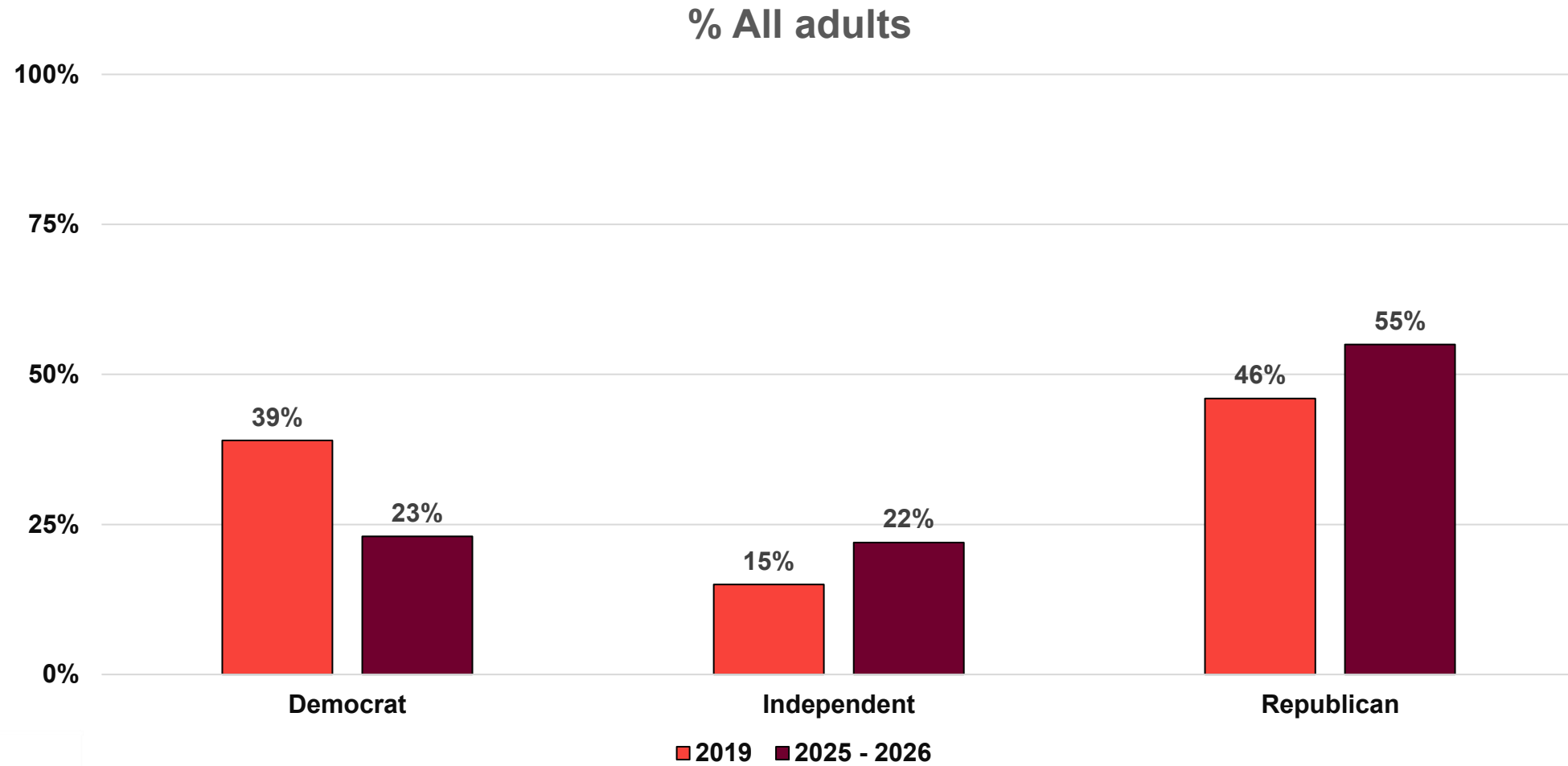
1. GMF / U. of Montana Nov. 2025 – Feb. 2026, 361 registered voters, address-based mail with web or mail response

2. American Pulse Feb. 2026, 607 likely voters, text-to-web, telephone, IVR

3. MT Free Press / Rutgers U. Dec. 2025 – Jan. 2026, 800 registered voters, text-to-web, telephone

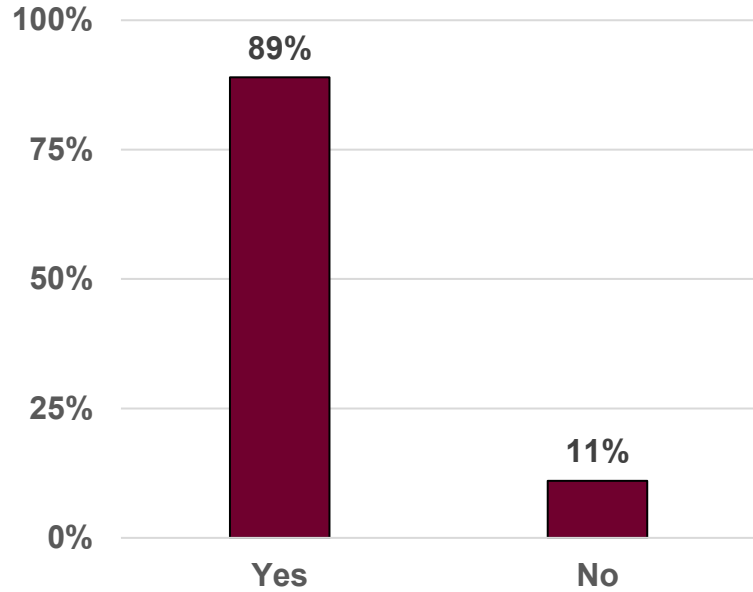
* Percentages will not add to 100 due to rounding and handling of missing answers

Montana Political Party Identification 2019 vs 2025-2026

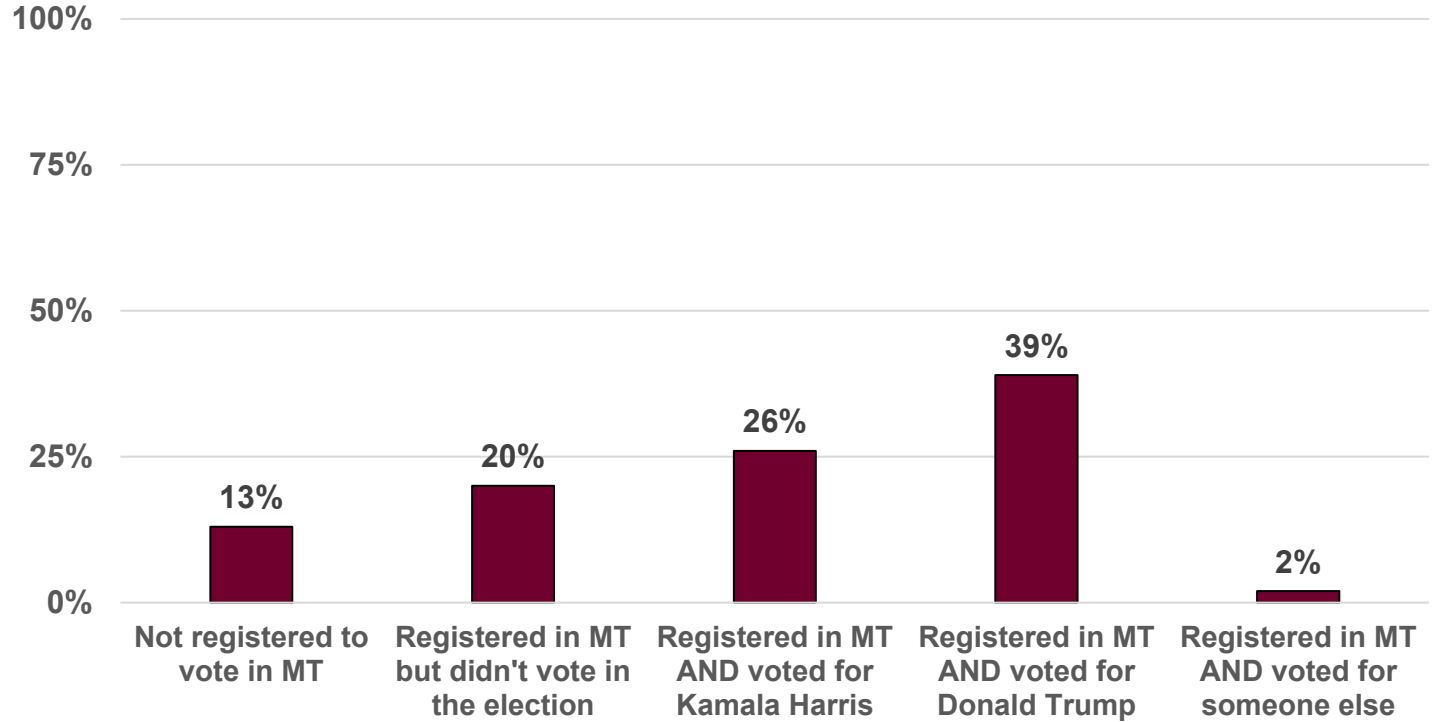


Voting in Montana

Registered to vote in Montana



2024 vote in the Presidential election



Methods summary

- Sponsored by the Greater Montana Foundation
- Random, address-based sample of 1,624 adult Montana residents
- Administered November 2025 - February 2026 by mail, responses collected by mail and the internet
- 406 completions, response rate 25% (AAPOR 2023, RR 3)
- Margin of error +/- 6%
- Other sources, like question wording and reporting inaccuracy, may contribute additional error

Methods summary - continued

- Weighted by sex, age, education, tenure, and 2024 Presidential election vote using data from U.S. Census Bureau and the Montana Secretary of State
- Sample purchased from Dynata, Inc.
- Administered by UM BBER with questionnaire and analytical assistance from Nicole McCleskey of Public Opinion Strategies
- Survey estimates for subgroups should be interpreted with care since they are based on fewer respondents
- Full question wording may be obtained from John Baldrige of UM BBER: john.baldrige@umontana.edu

Summary of Greater Montana Foundation surveys

Year	Administration Method	Completions	Margin of error (+/-)	Response Rate
2015	Telephone	526	4%	25%
2016	Telephone	567	4%	23%
2019	Mail - internet	579	4%	36%
2025 - 2026	Mail - internet	406	6%	25%