

**Consumption of Media on
Government and Politics
Among California Voters:**
*An Executive Summary of
Statewide Survey Research*

Prepared by

*Fairbank,
Maslin,
Maullin,
Metz &
Associates*

FM3

August 2013

Commissioned by the James Irvine Foundation

Exploring California Voters' Perceptions of the Media, Politics, and Government Voters Highly Engaged with News on Politics and Government. Communities of Color Access and Evaluate News Somewhat Differently. News Consumption Informs Civic Participation.

The results of our recent survey of California voters shows that they maintain a robust interest in getting the information they need to make decisions about elections and public policy issues. The data show an electorate that remains an avid consumer of news about government and politics – and is largely satisfied with the news it receives. Californians say that the news sources they use most often cover the issues that matter to them the most; are fair; are comprehensive; and reflect their views. And in the face of declining use of print media, the survey shows that voters in California are adopting digital media at a rapid pace -- with voters who use digital news saying that it is easier than ever to get news about government and politics at the state level.

In addition, the survey paints a more detailed picture of the news habits of voters of color in California than has previously been obtained. Though California's communities of color largely use the same sources of news about government as do white voters – primarily television and mainstream media journalism – there are substantial subgroups that also get some of their news from ethnic media outlets. The emergence of younger voters of color as frequent digital media users indicates further potential for change in how news will be delivered to these constituencies. And even though California's voters of color express high levels of satisfaction in the news they consume, many have mixed feelings on whether their own community's views are well-represented in the media at large. In particular, African American and non-Chinese Asian American/Pacific Islander voters are the most likely to say that the views of their respective ethnic groups are *not* well represented in the media.

The data also show that interest in news about government and politics and greater civic involvement go hand-in-hand; a majority of California voters reports active engagement in some facet of their community's civic life, with engagement concentrated among the most avid consumers of the news. While it is not surprising that these civically-engaged voters are also more likely follow the news, the survey also makes clear that voters see the news media they use as facilitating their participation. More than two-thirds of California voters report that the news source they use most often informs them about ways they can get involved.

More details about these and other key survey findings follow below.

MOST CALIFORNIA VOTERS ARE EAGER CONSUMERS OF NEWS ABOUT GOVERNMENT

California voters are enthusiastic consumers of news about government and politics.

California’s voters have a robust appetite for learning more about what government is doing. Fully 57 percent of voters say they are “very” or “extremely” interested in following news specifically about government and politics in the state – defined as covering everything from statewide elections to meetings of local school boards. Interest is present among voters of all political parties, but tends to be strongest among older, more affluent, more highly-educated voters.

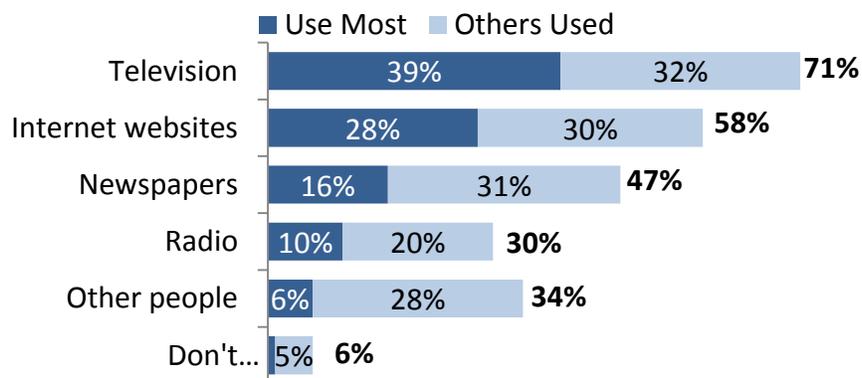
Level of Interest in News about California Government & Politics

“How interested would you say you are in news about California government and politics?”

Interest in California Government & Politics	All Voters	Party Registration		
		Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Total Extr./Very Interested	57%	57%	50%	63%
<i>Extremely interested</i>	21%	21%	16%	25%
<i>Very interested</i>	36%	36%	34%	38%
Somewhat interested	33%	35%	37%	27%
Not too/Not at all interested/DK	9%	7%	13%	10%

Television and the internet are voters’ main avenues to learning about state and local government and politics. California voters primarily take to television and the internet—and to a notably lesser degree, newspapers and radio – to learn about the activities of state and local government. Television remains the primary source of information for a plurality of voters, though fewer than two in five (39%) say it is the source of information they use most often.¹

Sources California Voters Use to Get Information about State Government and Politics



¹ Respondents did not specify the original sources of news they access on internet websites; these sources may include websites maintained by television stations, newspapers and radio stations – thereby further extending the reach of those sources.

Only a small minority of California voters prefers news that caters to their own particular point of view on major issues. Overall, 44 percent of voters say they prefer sources of news that don't have a particular political point of view, while a smaller group prefers sources that have a *different* political point of view than their own (13%). More than one-quarter of the electorate is indifferent, or seeks out a variety of perspectives in the news. Only one in five voters seeks out news that reinforces their own beliefs (21%).

California voters feel good about the news they use: they see their primary news source as fair, comprehensive, and informative. Voters give generally high marks to the news media they use most often to find out about government and politics – labeling it easy to understand, (94%) and saying that it digs beneath the surface of the issues (77%) and offers them ways to get involved (68%). Regardless of the platform they use to obtain the news, California voters say that the news source they use most often covers the issues that matter to them the most (90%), is fair (83%), and reflects the views of people like themselves (78%).

The mainstream media continue to dominate the news landscape in California, though voters express some reluctance to trust such sources. By a wide margin, California voters say that professional journalists working for mainstream media outlets are their primary source for news about California government and politics (68%). Ranking second in this category are professional journalists working for ethnic media outlets, with just eight percent of voters citing them as producing the news they use most.

This dynamic changes, however, when voters are asked to rank which of these sources they *trust* the most. While professional journalists at mainstream outlets are still ranked as the most *trusted* source, just 46 percent of voters select them – a notable 22-point decrease from the proportion of voters who rank them their most *used* source.

Trustworthiness and Reliability of California Government & Politics News Sources

“In general, who would you say writes or produces most of the news and information you receive about California government and politics? And which of these sources do you think is the most trustworthy and reliable source of news and information about California government and politics?”

News source	Used Most	Most Trusted/Reliable	Difference
Professional journalists working for mainstream media	68%	46%	-22%
Professional journalists working for ethnic media	8%	7%	-1%
Friends and family	6%	9%	+3%
Citizen journalists or bloggers	6%	10%	+4%
Community groups or leaders	5%	10%	+5%
<i>Don't Know/NA/Refused</i>	9%	18%	+9%

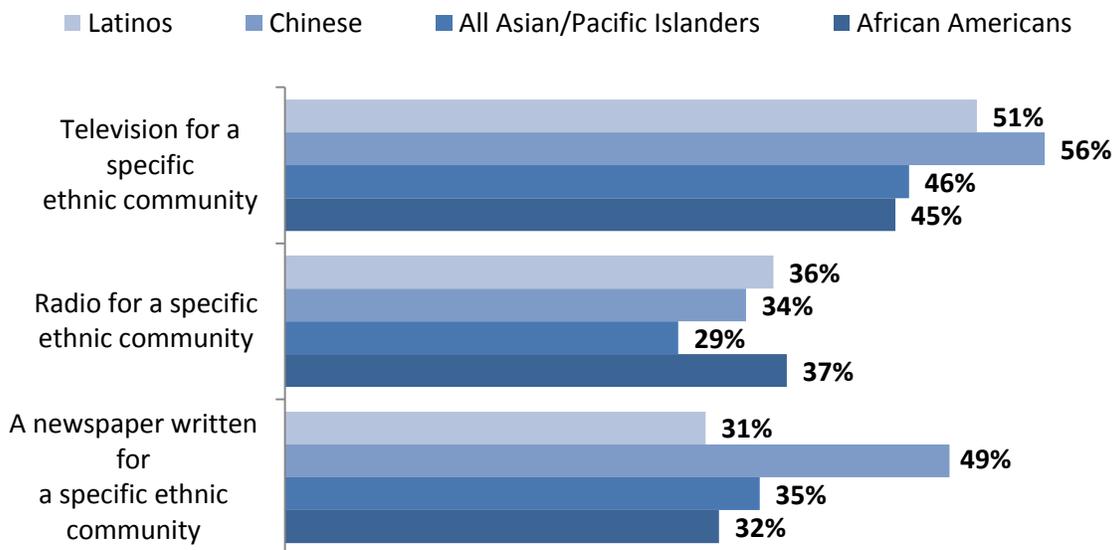
COMMUNITIES OF COLOR ACCESS AND EVALUATE NEWS SOMEWHAT DIFFERENTLY

In the big picture, communities of color use largely the same sources of news as do white voters. Latinos, African Americans, and Asians and Pacific Islanders all rank television, local newspapers, and information from friends, family and neighbors among their most frequently consulted sources of news. In these regards, they are little different from white voters in California.

In addition, all voters – regardless of ethnic background – rely on professional journalists in the mainstream media for most of their government and political news. With little variation by ethnicity, voters in California say the news they get primarily comes from professional journalists in the mainstream media, as opposed to professional journalists working for ethnic media, citizen journalists or bloggers, community groups or leaders, or family and friends.

At the same time, sizable proportions of voters of color get at least some of their news from ethnic media. A clear majority of voters of color – nearly four in five – makes at least occasional use of at least one source of ethnic media. However, only 14 percent of voters of color say that they rely *primarily* on information from professional journalists working in ethnic media for their news about government and politics.

Ethnic News Sources Used At Least Weekly by Voters of Color



Voters of color have mixed feelings on whether their views are well represented in the media at large. Chinese American voters report particularly high satisfaction with how their community's views are portrayed in the local media. However, non-Chinese Asian and Pacific Islander, African American and Latino voters are less likely than others to feel their own communities' views are well represented.

How Voters Perceive the Representation of Minority Views in the Local Media, by Ethnicity

“Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement:

‘I feel views of _____ are well-represented in the local media.’”

The views of _____ are well represented in the local media	Agree	Disagree
“Latinos”, Among:		
<i>All Voters</i>	59%	34%
<i>Latinos</i>	55%	41%
“African Americans”, Among:		
<i>All Voters</i>	55%	38%
<i>African Americans</i>	45%	53%
“Asians and Pacific Islanders”, Among:		
<i>All Voters</i>	42%	46%
<i>All Asians/Pacific Islanders</i>	48%	42%
<i>Chinese Americans</i>	61%	33%
<i>Non-Chinese Asian/Pacific Islanders</i>	43%	46%

A DESIRE TO BE PARTICIPANTS, NOT JUST RECIPIENTS

Most California voters are engaged in some kind of civic activity to improve conditions in their community. More than three in five California voters (61%) say they have engaged in some activity in the past year that has involved them in their community’s civic life. These activities may include attending a meeting of a public agency, writing a letter on a policy issue, posting a comment on social media, volunteering for a political campaign, or attending a meeting of a community group active on local issues. A recent Pew survey found that 48 percent of adults nationwide are civically engaged, using a similar metric; while the results are not directly comparable, since the California survey was of registered voters only, it suggests that California’s levels of civic engagement approximate those elsewhere.²

Civic engagement is highly correlated with interest in news about government and politics – but not with political affiliation. Those California voters with the highest rates of civic engagement are more likely than others to report an interest in news about government and politics, but they are not disproportionately likely to be Democrats, Republicans, or Independents. In addition, the most civically engaged voters are among the voters most satisfied with the news they consume. At the same time, civically engaged voters are more likely than others to believe that communities of color are underrepresented in the local media.

Voters believe that the media help them find ways to get involved in state and local government. As noted above, more than two-thirds of voters (68%) say that the television, radio, newspaper or internet news source they use most often “lets them know about ways they can get involved.”

² Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement/Summary-of-Findings.aspx>.