

Crossing Divides Listening Project Results Summary

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Civic Nebraska “Crossing Divides” Listening Project aims to build understanding about where people get their news and information and how they think about the sources they trust. Team members from Civic Nebraska interviewed Nebraskans from Scotts Bluff County and the City of Lincoln about the information sources they trust, why they trust them, and how their news media habits relate to their concerns about their community and media overall.

RESULTS

Key findings from the analysis are listed below.

Most participants trust news sources they perceive as unbiased. Regardless of place of residency or political ideology, many participants trust news sources they perceive as unbiased. Unbiased news sources were characterized as reporting “just the facts” or including multiple perspectives to represent the “whole picture.”

News sources with similar ideologies or experiences are viewed as trustworthy for some. Regardless of place of residency or political ideology, some participants trust news sources that espouse similar values or ideology and distrust news sources that run counter to their worldview.

Most participants are concerned about media’s contribution to division in their communities. The most frequently recurring concern, regardless of place of residence or political ideology, is the media’s role in the division between people of different ideologies. Participants felt this division prevents meaningful dialogue and could lead to violence.

Many participants expressed difficulty in knowing what is “true.” As a result of the current media landscape, many participants expressed difficulty in knowing what is “true.” Participants were also concerned with their community’s ability to discern the truth.

Individual news habits are associated with perceptions of trust and concerns about the media. Participants who habitually fact check the news they consume often expressed concerns that the current media landscape is resulting in a less-informed public and poor decision making. Participants who habitually gather sources from different perspectives often had concerns about bias in the media. Some participants discussed avoiding the news because it makes them depressed, angry, or hopeless. These individuals also expressed concerns about knowing what is “true” and about their community’s ability to discern the truth.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Key considerations might include:

1. Further examine specific concerns related to the media’s contribution to division in families and communities.
2. Further examine whether a lack of trustworthiness perceived in news media is contributing to hopelessness and news avoidance and explore strategies to cope with these feelings.
3. Gather input about how to improve or find solutions for trustworthiness of news media. Such solutions could include policy, individual, or community-led solutions to media.