



The Meredith Poll Examines Political Media Consumption and Perceptions of Fake News

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For Immediate Release

March 14, 2017

Meredith College, Raleigh, N.C. — A large majority of North Carolina voters believe fake news is a major issue, according to The Meredith Poll, which found that 88.4% of North Carolinians think fake news confuses Americans about politics and government.

This belief in the existence and power of fake news to affect the American political culture affected all groups of North Carolinians equally as there were no significant differences based on party affiliation, age, racial or ethnic group, or where a person is from.

Similarly, a large percentage of North Carolinians (75.2%) report that they come across fake news stories frequently or occasionally. Again, few differences exist between groups in terms of reporting their exposure to fake news stories.

“North Carolinians are highly suspicious of news stories, as a large majority feel that fake news is a significant issue in their lives, as almost three-quarters of voters feel that they see fake news occasionally or frequently and a higher number think that fake news is affecting people’s understanding of politics and government,” said Visiting Professor of Political Science David McLennan, one of the directors of The Meredith Poll.

A large majority of voters (81.9%) feel very confident or somewhat confident in their ability to spot fake news. Democrats and Republicans felt equally confident in their ability to spot fake news stories, as did North Carolinians of all age groups.

It is likely that the highly partisan nature of politics in the state and nation has caused North Carolinians to label any political news they disagree with as “fake news.” Although there is evidence of fake news stories that have been spread through social media, the perceived impact of these stories is greater than their actual significance.

Media Usage

The Meredith Poll also asked voters where they get their political news. Television was the most popular response, but the primary network mentioned depended upon the respondent’s political party. Democrats and unaffiliated voters listed CNN as their primary source, while Republicans said Fox News was their primary source. Those who listed news websites as their primary source followed a similar pattern. CNN’s site was mentioned most frequently by Democrats, by a 3-to-1 margin over the second most mentioned site, *The New*

York Times. Republicans identified the Fox News site by a 2-to-1 margin over CNN.com. Younger voters mentioned social media sites – with Facebook significantly more popular across all demographic groups – as their primary places to get political news. Radio and print were the primary political news sources for a small segment of North Carolinians. The top choice for radio listeners was NPR, especially for urban respondents, while rural respondents preferred local AM talk radio. Readers of newspapers were almost evenly split between local daily papers (e.g., *News and Observer*) and national papers (e.g., *New York Times*).

Political Polarization

A large majority of North Carolinians (86.7%) feel that the country is more divided today than in the past. There is general agreement by Democrats, Republicans, and unaffiliated voters that the country is highly polarized. However, when citizens were asked about whether the country will be more, less, or equally divided in five years, Republicans were decidedly more optimistic that the country would be less divided, with approximately one-third of these citizens (34.7%) stating that the country would be less divided, while only one-in-five Democrats and unaffiliated voters believe that the country will be less divided.

“The results indicate that North Carolinians live in political bubbles in which they favor media outlets that reflect their political beliefs. This helps explain the extreme partisanship that they report and the overall pessimism that the political divide will be bridged in the near future,” said McLennan.

View the full report at http://www.meredith.edu/about_meredith/college-research/poll.

About The Meredith Poll

For this poll, Meredith College used both an email survey and a live-caller, dual frame (landline and cell phone) survey of 876 **registered voters** of North Carolina between February 19-28, 2017. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points for registered voters. Meredith College students administer the survey as part of the College’s commitment to civic engagement.

About Meredith College

Chartered in 1891, Meredith College opened with just over 200 women. Today, our student body has grown to nearly 2,000, and includes men at the graduate level. Meredith challenges students to explore their interests, expand their skills, and build on their strengths. At 126 years and counting, Meredith College is still going strong.