THE 2022 TRUSTED MESSENGER STUDY

The Annual Study of Who Americans Trust On Social and Societal Issues

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Introduction

When concerns around misinformation and fake news are at an [all-time high](#), who do Americans turn to as messengers of real, unbiased, *trustworthy* information?

The [2022 Edelman Trust Barometer](#) paints a pessimistic picture of trust around the globe: Societal fears are on the rise (job loss, climate change, cyber hacks, losing freedoms, increased racism), and leaders aren't trusted to solve them. We're more convinced we're being lied to by leaders than ever before, and we tend to distrust information until we see evidence otherwise. Trust in democracy is dwindling, as it is in economic optimism.

Overall it seems, as the Edelman report put it, "Distrust is now society's default emotion."

So who, then, do we trust to deliver relevant and important information to us?

In 2021, the Ad Council Research Institute (ACRI) launched a multi-year study on trusted messengers to determine just that: When it comes to the most important (and often divisive) issues today, to whom do Americans turn for information and to help guide decision making?

Trusted messengers are individuals we turn to and trust for honest, unbiased information, and to help guide decision making on important issues.

When it comes to disseminating important information, brands and causes will often look to the influencer—the celebrity, the athlete, those with large social followings—as the key to generating broad awareness and inspiring action. Particularly when paired with sources deemed credible and knowledgeable or when highlighting a local/regional connection, influencers and celebrities can successfully leverage their reach and audience to spread information and generate awareness on broad levels.

However, our research has shown that there's more to the story regarding influencers as messengers. As we found in 2021, the majority of Americans may become aware of an issue from such broader individuals (celebrities, the media, politicians/government officials)—but they look to those much closer to them (spouses, family, friends), as well as credentialed professionals (doctors, scientists) to help dissect the information and make decisions as a result.
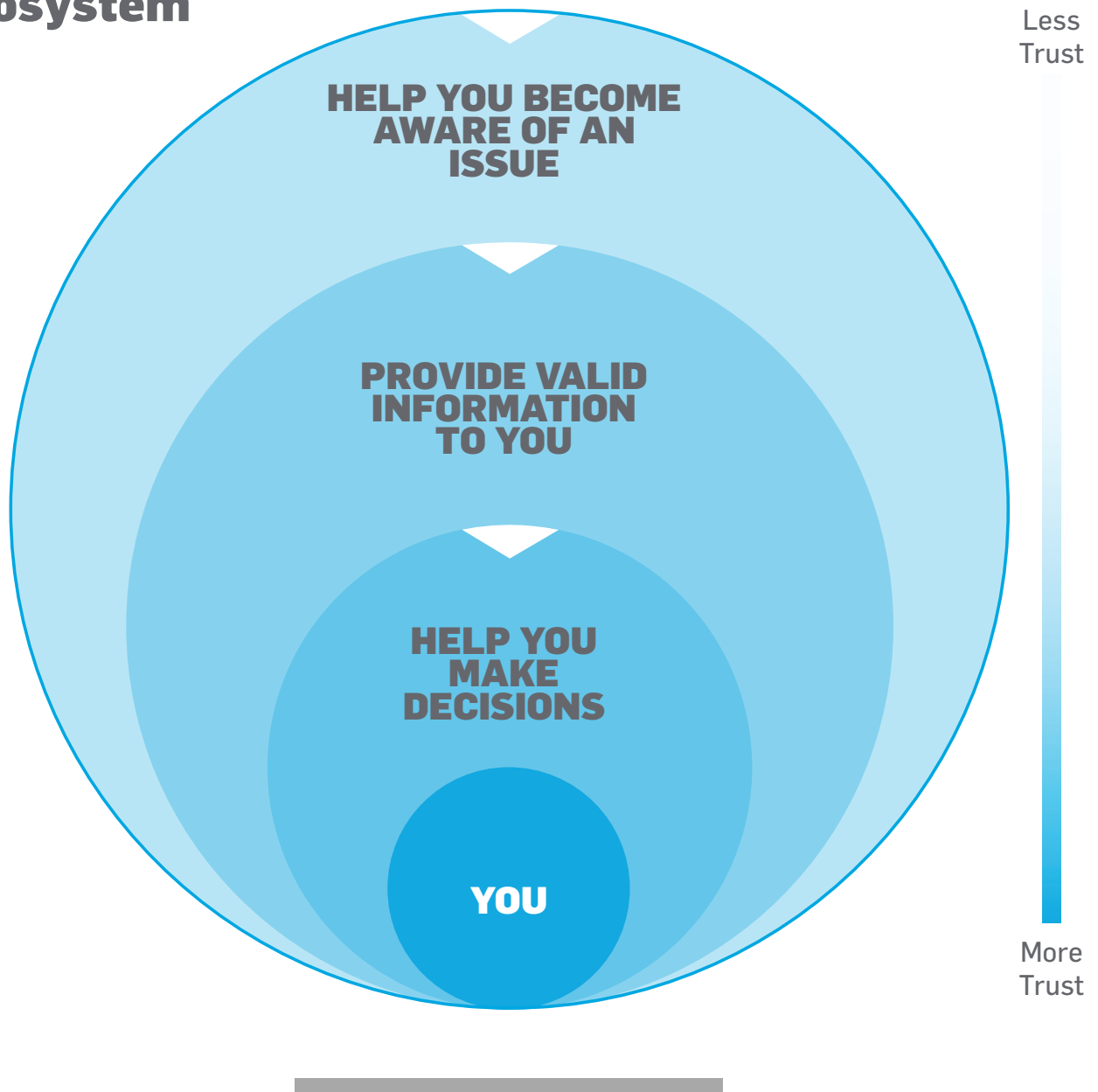
The Marketer's Toolbox:
Reach Does Not Equal Trust

As noted in our 2021 report, reach does not necessarily correlate to trust. Though individuals today have access to the tools to make global communication possible, that doesn't inherently mean that their message is seen as trustworthy by those who receive it.

Social issue marketers today have a nearly endless array of tools at their disposal to create and share content and information within their networks, both on and offline. While such tools present an opportunity, they have also created a challenge. Beyond simply informing audiences, social issue marketers and leaders must be able to go further: To build new knowledge, to shift perceptions and to ignite new behaviors.

In other words, the amplification of a message is no longer enough. Marketers must understand the level of trust audiences have in the messenger—the individual that brings knowledge, personal experiences and unbiased viewpoints. In order to inspire new behaviors through social issue efforts, marketers must look at the ecosystem in which individuals move from awareness to understanding to action, finding the right messenger (or messengers) for a particular issue.

The Trusted Messenger Ecosystem

HELP YOU BECOME AWARE OF AN ISSUE

PROVIDE VALID INFORMATION TO YOU

HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS

YOU

Less Trust

More Trust

In 2022, we again asked Americans who they listen to and trust at each stage of the decision-making process, from becoming aware of an issue, to understanding and finding trusted information on the issue, to taking action for the issue. And again, we saw the same trends as in 2021: The closer a person is to one's inner circle, the more that person is generally trusted for information and decision making.

Amid the barrage of often divisive social issues and the 2022 midterm elections, brands and causes addressing the American public must understand that *who* the message comes from is just as important—if not more—than *what* the specific content of the message is.

Purpose

The Trusted Messenger Study was designed to identify the messengers Americans trust to become aware of, informed about and incite personal action on key social issues. This study aims to better inform brands, causes and civic groups working to educate and inspire the American public at all levels on these topics.

This study is an ongoing, annual exploration, which began in 2021 ([see the full report here](#)). Now in its second year, the 2022 study sought to update this information amid the current climate as well as dig deeper into the trusted messengers *beyond* one's inner circle of friends and family.

In 2022, ACRI conducted a mixed-methods research study to:
- Identify the trusted messengers at each level of the Trusted Messenger Ecosystem (generate awareness, provide information/further inform, make decisions) for advice/opinions on social issues, in general and for six specific current topics/issues.
  - 2022 topics included: voting/democracy, health/wellness, mental health, racial equity & justice, climate change and addiction.
- Understand what makes these messengers trusted for their advice/opinions.
- Pinpoint the specific trusted messengers that spark action.

As noted previously, this study differs from others in that it does not seek to survey the public on trusted news sources, or on the validity of the information being shared. This study specifically looks at the messenger of such information, and if/why that person is believed to be trustworthy.

So when it comes to understanding and taking action for key social issues, who do Americans deem trustworthy—particularly beyond their inner circle—and why? Who should brands and causes leverage to reach, inform and inspire Americans to take action? How do trusted messengers vary by social issue or by demographic categories (such as generation and political affiliation)?

The findings in this report answer these questions and provide a deeper look into today's top trusted messengers.

Methodology

This study consisted of both online qualitative interviews and an online quantitative survey.

Qualitative Interviews

The qualitative phase included a three-day online qualitative sample and a journal activity among 40 respondents. This phase was implemented August 23-25, 2022.

Demographically, this phase was made up of:

- 21 women, 19 men
- Mix of ages (18-75) and generations:
    - Gen Z: 12
    - Millennials: 9
    - Gen X: 9
    - Baby Boomers: 10
    - Within each generation, we recruited a mix of gender, age and subsets of ethnicities + biracial participants.
- Mix of urbanity (rural, urban, suburban):
    - Urban: 18
    - Suburban: 16
    - Rural: 6
- Overall mix of income, education and region.
- Standard industry security, past participation, technology and articulation screens.

The qualitative research was intended to further understand the various segments of whom the general public considers as trusted messengers on a variety of topics and why; to further validate the Trusted Messenger Ecosystem developed from past research; and to better inform the quantitative survey questionnaire.

Quantitative Phase

A 15-minute online survey was conducted from September 12-30, 2022 among U.S. adults ages 18-75. Total respondents were representative of the U.S. General Population based on age, gender, race/ethnicity, income and region; data is weighted by gender within generation and race/ethnicity groups to be representative. This survey was offered in English, Spanish and Mandarin.

Overall, n=2,502 surveys were completed. Key differences are noted throughout this report for the following subgroups:

Generations:
- **Gen Z** (age 18-25): 11% of General Population (n=281)
- **Millennials** (age 26-42): 33% of General Population (n=823)
- **Gen X** (age 43-57): 25% of General Population (n=625)
- **Baby Boomers** (age 58-75): 31% of General Population (n=773)

Race/Ethnicity:
- **White Only**: 67% of General Population (n=1,689)
- **Hispanic**: 16% of General Population (n=422)
- **Black Only**: 14% of General Population (n=355)
- **Asian Only**: 8% of General Population (n=210[1])
- **Mixed Race**: 4% of General Population (n=200[2])

1. Additional interviews were collected for Asian respondents to achieve a sample size of n=200 in total.
2. Additional interviews were collected for Mixed-Race respondents to achieve a sample size of n=200 in total.

Findings

The findings in this study are divided into four sections:
- · Who do Americans trust for becoming and staying informed?
- · What makes a messenger trustworthy?
- · How do Americans take action for key social issues, and who helps persuade them?
- · What messengers, information and actions move the needle on select social issues?

As noted previously, it is critical to understand that this study is not about trust or distrust of the information or the source; it is about trust in the person or entity *delivering* a message, and what makes them trustworthy.

Some comparisons are made to 2021 data throughout. However, the 2022 survey was adjusted from last year's, so trends should be viewed within this context.

Finally, the research team looked at all findings by general population, as well as for noticeable trends by demographic categories: race/ethnicity, political ideology, employment level, and more. Throughout the report, significant differences by such categories have been noted; if no differences are noted, there was nothing significant to report for any demographic category compared to the general population.

Who do Americans trust for becoming and staying informed?

As a result of the 2021 study, ACRI developed the Trusted Messenger Ecosystem, which illustrates the messengers needed within the information gathering process, and how multiple types of trusted messengers co-exist in the wider ecosystem to inform and ultimately inspire action. In this year's study, we validated this concept and a graphic representation of the ecosystem in both qualitative and quantitative phases.

As a person moves from awareness to understanding to action, they continually turn to (and trust) those closer to them.

Less Trust

HELP YOU BECOME AWARE OF AN ISSUE

PROVIDE VALID INFORMATION TO YOU

HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS

YOU

More Trust
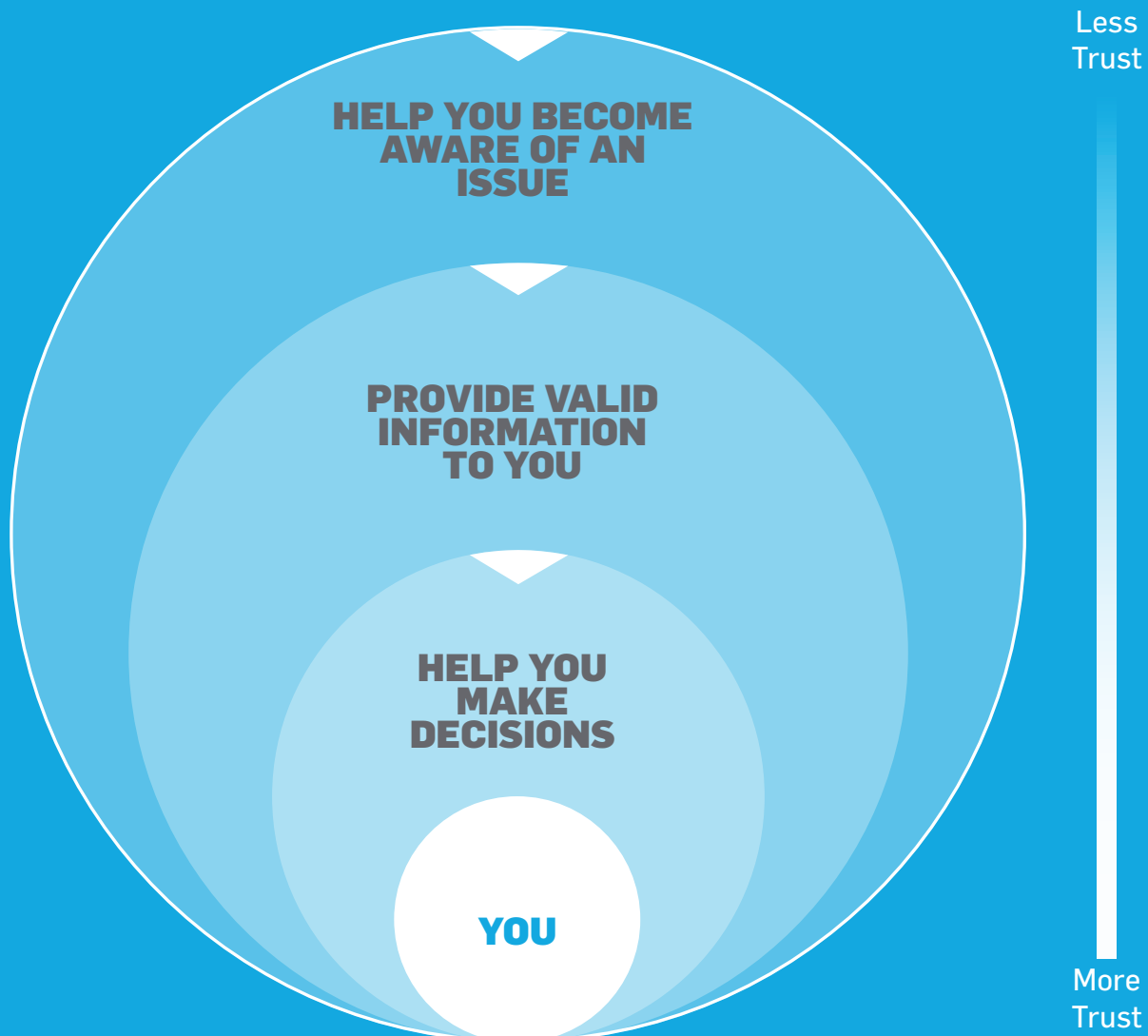
As a person shifts from awareness of to action for an issue, they move through various stages of understanding—each of which is marked by different trusted messengers. This visual representation illustrates how those in the outer circle have wider influence and reach and are able to generate awareness of an issue on a broader level—though one might not "personally" know them. As a person deepens their understanding of the issue and seeks to remain informed and/or take further action, they turn to those in their inner circle who are more persuasive to motivate a person to change. However, a person's inner circle is individual—meaning your inner circle is yours, but it doesn't influence someone else.

*"A widely known figure **can use their notoriety as a platform for bringing attention** to an issue, unlike people I know personally. People that I am more personally acquainted with can and will discuss an issue with me."*

- Baby Boomer, Mixed Race, Female

The majority of Americans (67%) agreed overall with the ecosystem concept, and they understand how different messengers are needed as a person goes through awareness, information gathering and decision making processes. Only 5% disagreed, saying they make decisions on their own or were unsure if the ecosystem could apply to all instances.

Agreement with Messenger Ecosystem

%Top 2 Box	**67%**
Agree Completely	**28%**
Agree Somewhat	**39%**
Neither Agree nor Disagree	**28%**
Disagree Somewhat/Completely	**5%**
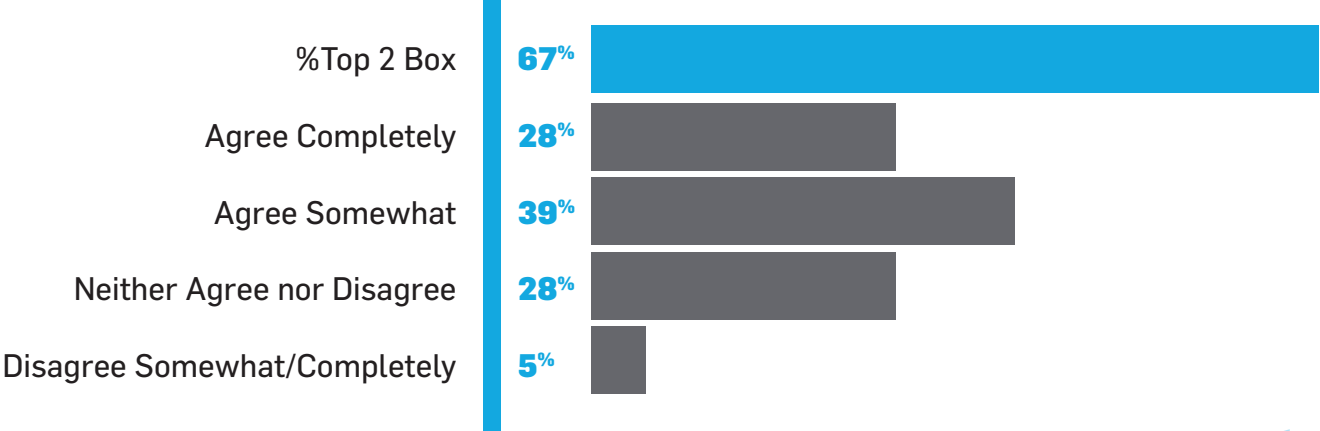
*"People closer in the circle to you **have more of an influence**."*

- Gen Z, Black, Female

Messengers with broader reach help people become aware of an issue.

Americans say they initially become aware of a social issue from a variety of messengers. Beyond close friends and a spouse/partner, Americans become aware of issues from many of those with broad reach (and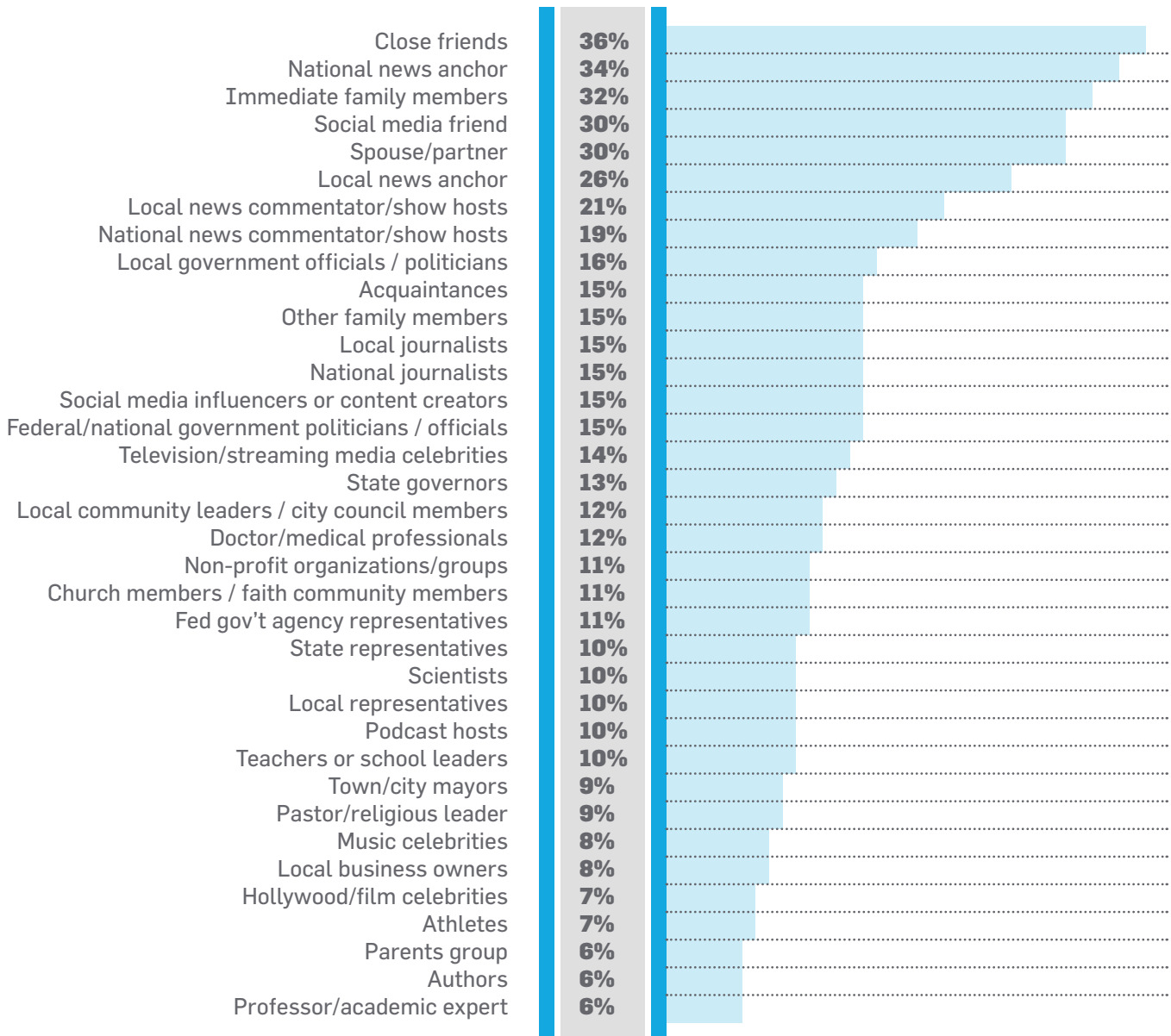 that they may not personally know), such as national/local news anchors, social media friends, news commentator/show hosts, local government officials/ politicians, journalists and social media influencers or celebrities.

Younger generations more than older ones tend to become aware of issues by social media influencers, celebrities and podcast hosts; Baby Boomers more than younger generations become aware of issues from politicians or government representatives. More Black, Hispanic and Asian Americans than white Americans become aware of issues through social media and celebrities, while more Mixed Race respondents cited non-profit organizations and religious communities.

Messengers Who Help Spread Awareness

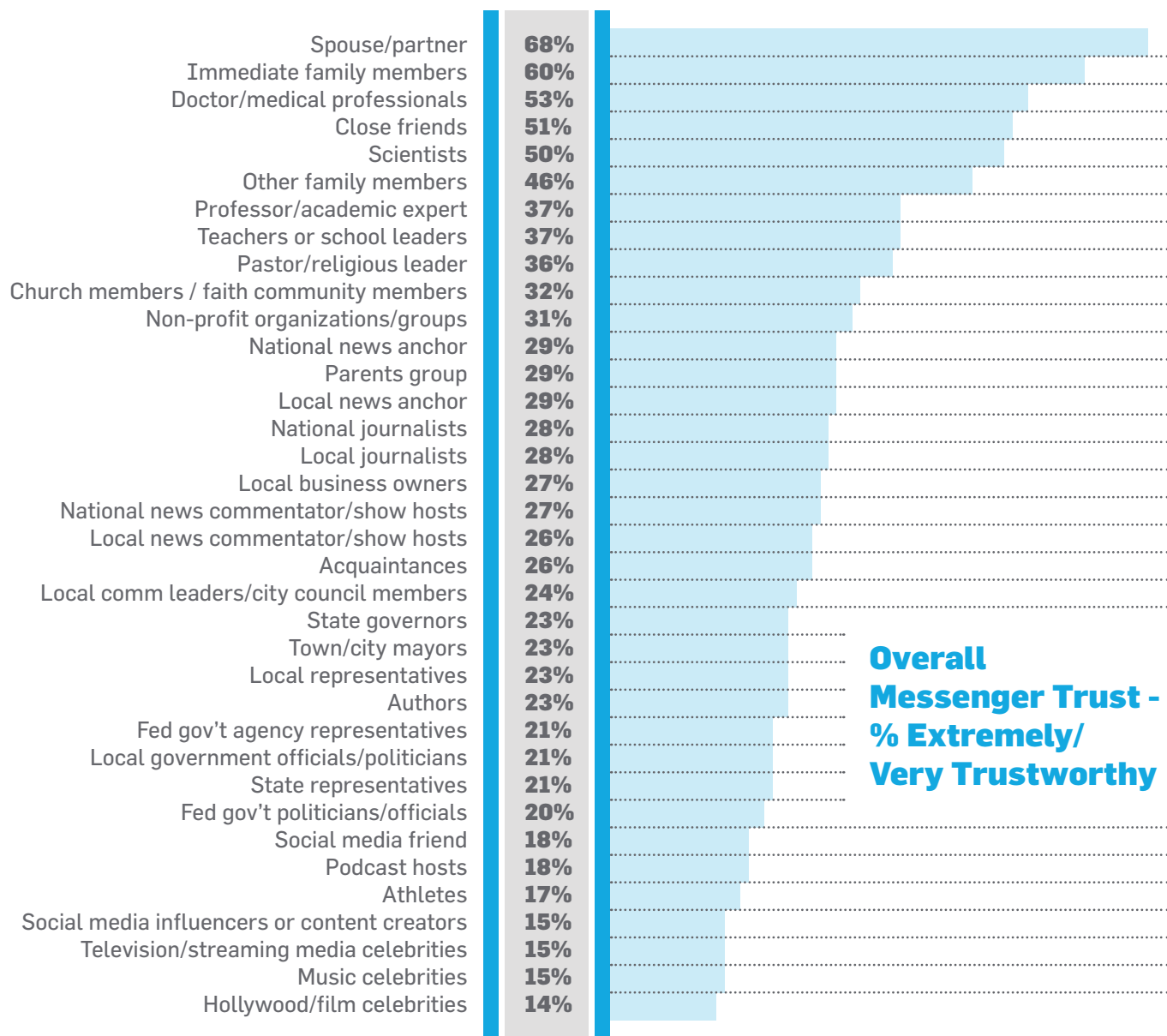| Messenger	%
Close friends	36%
National news anchor	34%
Immediate family members	32%
Social media friend	30%
Spouse/partner	30%
Local news anchor	26%
Local news commentator/show hosts	21%
National news commentator/show hosts	19%
Local government officials / politicians	16%
Acquaintances	15%
Other family members	15%
Local journalists	15%
National journalists	15%
Social media influencers or content creators	15%
Federal/national government politicians / officials	15%
Television/streaming media celebrities	14%
State governors	13%
Local community leaders / city council members	12%
Doctor/medical professionals	12%
Non-profit organizations/groups	11%
Church members / faith community members	11%
Fed gov't agency representatives	11%
State representatives	10%
Scientists	10%
Local representatives	10%
Podcast hosts	10%
Teachers or school leaders	10%
Town/city mayors	9%
Pastor/religious leader	9%
Music celebrities	8%
Local business owners	8%
Hollywood/film celebrities	7%
Athletes	7%
Parents group	6%
Authors	6%
Professor/academic expert	6%

... but as they start to gather more information, they look to family/ friends, credentialed experts or local leaders.

As we found in our 2021 study, family and close friends top the list of trusted messengers to whom Americans turn when moving from awareness to understanding and deepening their knowledge of an issue. They also turn to experts and local leaders: doctors/medical professionals, scientists, professors/academic experts, teachers or school leaders, pastors/ religious leaders, church members/faith community members and non-profit organizations/ groups.

Conversely, social media influencers or friends, celebrities and athletes garnered strong levels of distrust in this information gathering stage.

By demographic groups, Baby Boomers are especially trusting of family compared to younger generations, while younger groups are somewhat more trusting of messengers like celebrities, content creators, etc. White respondents are especially trusting of family and experts comparatively, whereas Black Americans are more trusting of messengers like church leaders/members, teachers, celebrities, social media and more.

Messenger	%
Spouse/partner	68%
Immediate family members	60%
Doctor/medical professionals	53%
Close friends	51%
Scientists	50%
Other family members	46%
Professor/academic expert	37%
Teachers or school leaders	37%
Pastor/religious leader	36%
Church members / faith community members	32%
Non-profit organizations/groups	31%
National news anchor	29%
Parents group	29%
Local news anchor	29%
National journalists	28%
Local journalists	28%
Local business owners	27%
National news commentator/show hosts	27%
Local news commentator/show hosts	26%
Acquaintances	26%
Local comm leaders/city council members	24%
State governors	23%
Town/city mayors	23%
Local representatives	23%
Authors	23%
Fed gov't agency representatives	21%
Local government officials/politicians	21%
State representatives	21%
Fed gov't politicians/officials	20%
Social media friend	18%
Podcast hosts	18%
Athletes	17%
Social media influencers or content creators	15%
Television/streaming media celebrities	15%
Music celebrities	15%
Hollywood/film celebrities	14%

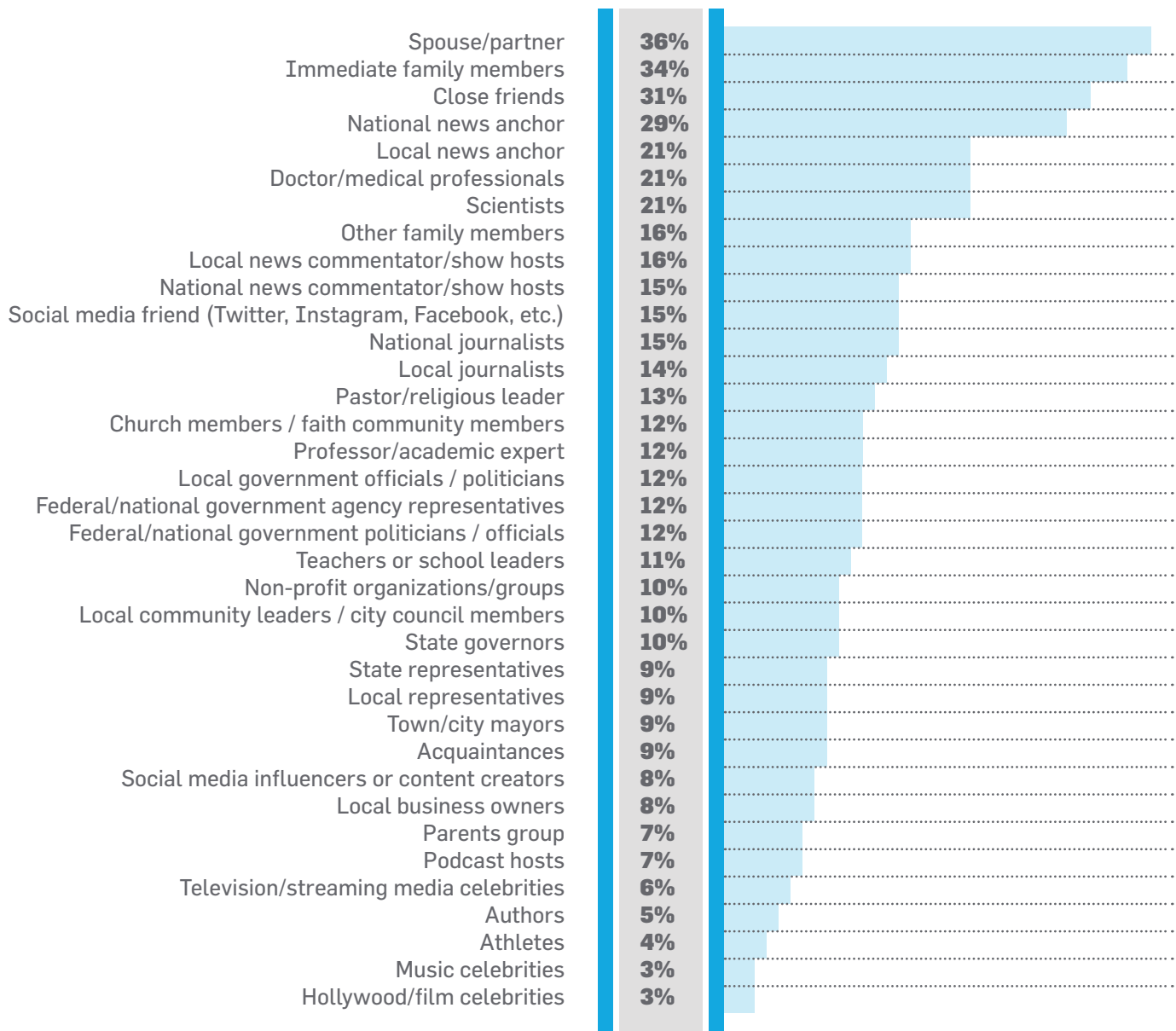**Overall Messenger Trust - % Extremely/ Very Trustworthy**

To remain informed on an issue, Americans again look to family/ friends, medical professionals and scientists—as well as news anchors and commentators.

Spouse/partner, immediate family and close friends again top the list as the trusted messengers Americans look to for remaining informed on social issues on an ongoing basis. Family/friends are followed by national and local news anchors, doctors/medical professionals, scientists, local/national news commentators or show hosts, social media friends and national/local journalists. Celebrities, athletes, authors and podcast hosts are least trusted at this stage.

Demographically, younger generations are more likely to turn to social media friends or influencers to stay informed than older ones, while Baby Boomers are more likely to seek out further information from politicians/representatives or their religious community. White Americans more than other races/ethnicities rely on family and experts at this stage.
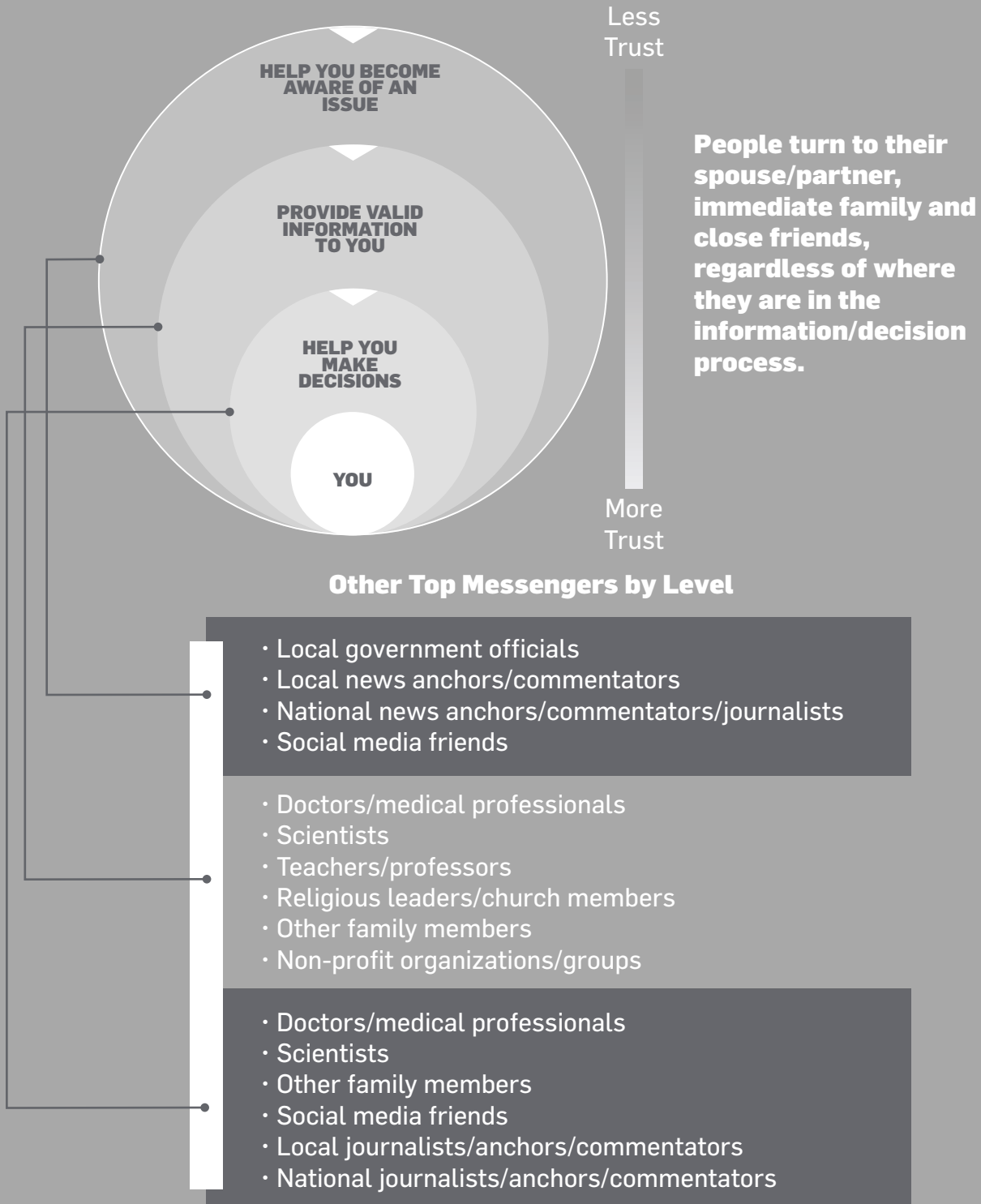
Messengers for Remaining Informed/Further Information

Spouse/partner	36%
Immediate family members	34%
Close friends	31%
National news anchor	29%
Local news anchor	21%
Doctor/medical professionals	21%
Scientists	21%
Other family members	16%
Local news commentator/show hosts	16%
National news commentator/show hosts	15%
Social media friend (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.)	15%
National journalists	15%
Local journalists	14%
Pastor/religious leader	13%
Church members / faith community members	12%
Professor/academic expert	12%
Local government officials / politicians	12%
Federal/national government agency representatives	12%
Federal/national government politicians / officials	12%
Teachers or school leaders	11%
Non-profit organizations/groups	10%
Local community leaders / city council members	10%
State governors	10%
State representatives	9%
Local representatives	9%
Town/city mayors	9%
Acquaintances	9%
Social media influencers or content creators	8%
Local business owners	8%
Parents group	7%
Podcast hosts	7%
Television/streaming media celebrities	6%
Authors	5%
Athletes	4%
Music celebrities	3%
Hollywood/film celebrities	3%

Overall, the closer a messenger is to a person, the more Americans trust and seek out information from them.

Broader reach helps drive initial awareness, but for becoming more and remaining informed, Americans generally trust messengers with either a close personal connection or expert credentials. Once people have information, they may revert back to those with broader reach to help make decisions or remain informed (e.g., local/national journalists, anchors, commentators)—but regardless of where they are in the knowledge journey, family and friends are always trusted messengers.

Messengers for Remaining Informed/Further Information

HELP YOU BECOME AWARE OF AN ISSUE

PROVIDE VALID INFORMATION TO YOU

HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS

YOU

Less Trust

More Trust

People turn to their spouse/partner, immediate family and close friends, regardless of where they are in the information/decision process.

Other Top Messengers by Level

- Local government officials
- Local news anchors/commentators
- National news anchors/commentators/journalists
- Social media friends

- Doctors/medical professionals
- Scientists
- Teachers/professors
- Religious leaders/church members
- Other family members
- Non-profit organizations/groups

- Doctors/medical professionals
- Scientists
- Other family members
- Social media friends
- Local journalists/anchors/commentators
- National journalists/anchors/commentators

By political affiliation, trust in scientists, professionals and academics remains very low among Republicans.

Like in 2021, the 2022 study saw significant differences by political affiliation in the trusted messengers Americans turn to for more information. Democrats regularly turn to professionals for information, including doctors/medical professionals, scientists, professors/academic experts and teachers/school leaders—as well as non-profit organizations. Republicans are much less likely to trust these individuals for information, and instead are more likely to trust pastors/religious leaders.

	Gen Pop	Strong Republican (A)	Leaning Republican (B)	Independent (C)	Leaning Democrat (D)	Strong Democrat (E)
Doctor/medical professionals	53%	48% C	50% C	42%	62% ABC	64% ABC
Scientists	50%	31%	37%	42% A	65% ABC	69% ABC
Professor/academic expert	37%	23%	27%	29%	47% ABC	56% ABCD
Teachers or school leaders	37%	27%	32%	30%	45% ABC	49% ABC
Pastor/religious leader	36%	53% BCDE	41% CD	26%	33% C	37% C
Non-profit organizations/groups	31%	25%	26%	22%	38% ABC	45% ABCD

Americans living in urban areas are much more trusting overall than those in other areas.

Individuals living in urban areas have much more trust in all messengers than those in rural or suburban areas, especially with doctors/medical professionals, scientists, professors/academic experts and teachers/school leaders. The only messenger with similar levels of trust between urban and rural Americans is pastors/religious leaders.

	Gen Pop	Urban (A)	Suburban (B)	Rural (C)
Doctor/medical professionals	53%	57% BC	52% C	44%
Scientists	50%	55% BC	50% C	38%
Professor/academic expert	37%	44% BC	36% C	28%
Teachers or school leaders	37%	43% BC	35% C	30%
Pastor/religious leader	36%	40% B	32%	38% B
Non-profit organizations/groups	31%	38% BC	30% C	23%

What makes a messenger trustworthy?

So what makes a messenger trustworthy? Overall, characteristics that lend themselves to trustworthiness remained consistent with the 2021 study.
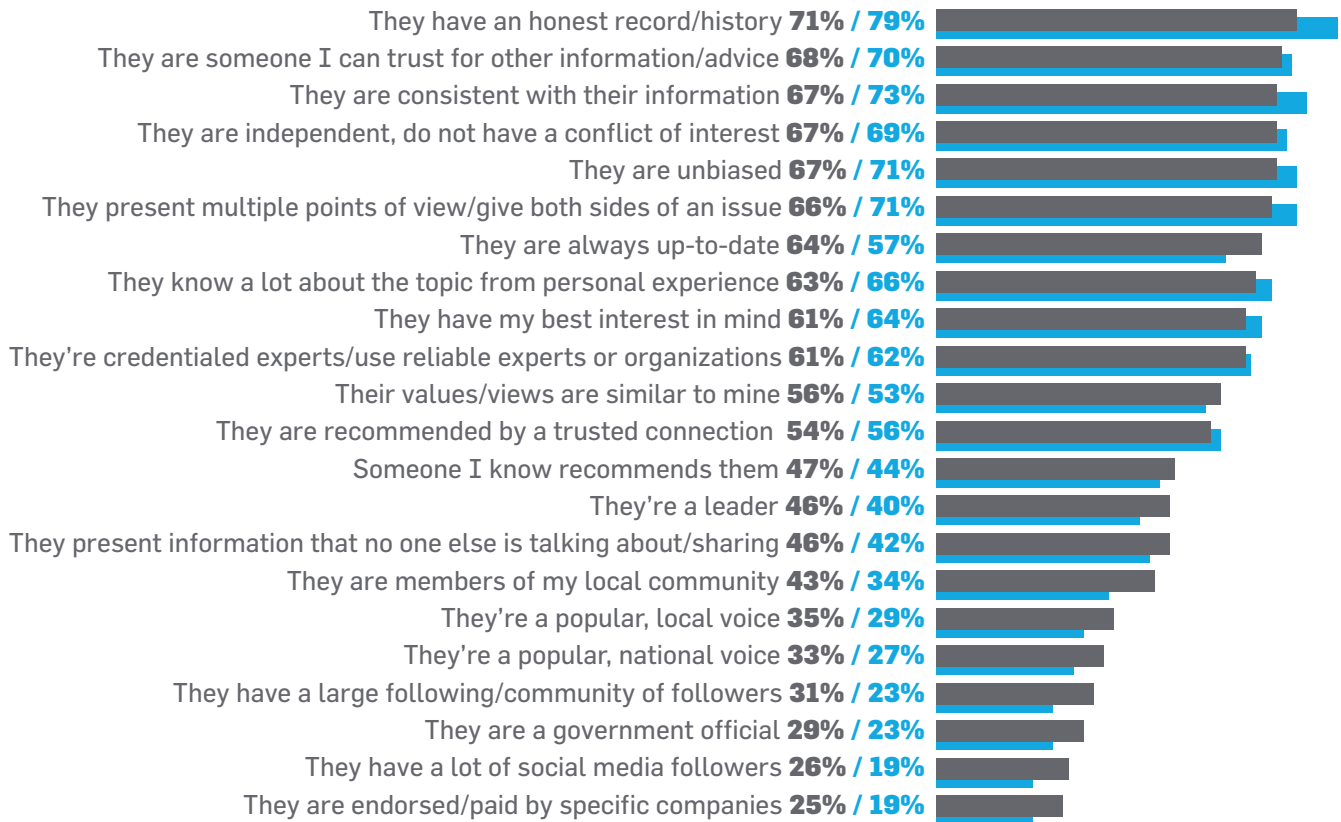
Honesty, consistency and a lack of bias lead to trust.

Similar to last year's study, having an honest record or history topped the list for traits that make a person trustworthy (71%). Other characteristics of trustworthiness include:

- They are someone I can trust for other information/advice (68%).
- They are consistent with their information (67%).
- They are independent; do not have a conflict of interest (67%).
- They are unbiased (67%).
- They present multiple points of view/give both sides of an issue (66%).

Characteristics that do *not* lend themselves to trustworthiness, also similar to the 2021 study, are primarily related to making money or broad popularity: they're endorsed or paid by companies (25%), they have a lot of social media followers (26%), they're a government official (29%), they have a large following or community of followers (31%) or they're a popular national or local voice (35%).

Overall Reasons for Trusting Messengers for More Information

● 2022　● Fall 2021

Reason	2022 / Fall 2021
They have an honest record/history	**71% / 79%**
They are someone I can trust for other information/advice	**68% / 70%**
They are consistent with their information	**67% / 73%**
They are independent, do not have a conflict of interest	**67% / 69%**
They are unbiased	**67% / 71%**
They present multiple points of view/give both sides of an issue	**66% / 71%**
They are always up-to-date	**64% / 57%**
They know a lot about the topic from personal experience	**63% / 66%**
They have my best interest in mind	**61% / 64%**
They're credentialed experts/use reliable experts or organizations	**61% / 62%**
Their values/views are similar to mine	**56% / 53%**
They are recommended by a trusted connection	**54% / 56%**
Someone I know recommends them	**47% / 44%**
They're a leader	**46% / 40%**
They present information that no one else is talking about/sharing	**46% / 42%**
They are members of my local community	**43% / 34%**
They're a popular, local voice	**35% / 29%**
They're a popular, national voice	**33% / 27%**
They have a large following/community of followers	**31% / 23%**
They are a government official	**29% / 23%**
They have a lot of social media followers	**26% / 19%**
They are endorsed/paid by specific companies	**25% / 19%**

*"I'm more likely to trust smaller celebrities or influencers (like fewer fans). **I feel like they're more grounded in reality and can relate more to my specific circumstances.** I would be less likely to trust larger celebrities or influencers (with more fans), because I feel like they're so rich and famous that they're not even on the same planet that normal people are on..."*

- Gen Z

*"Context is important. For example, **I generally wouldn't trust a white person to tell me about racism. I generally wouldn't trust a rich person to tell me about income inequality.** Thinking about that person's background is important."*

- Gen Z

Positive first impressions play a substantial role in establishing whom people trust.

As we heard in the qualitative phase, people like to learn from those they admire:

- People who have similar backgrounds, identities (like race/ethnicity), even political views.
- People they aspire to emulate in some way.
- In-culture people/personalities.
- Had a hard upbringing; starting from nothing, fighting for justice in some way (for some).

First impressions also matter, and sometimes physically. Qualitative participants noted they have gut reactions to trust (or not trust) what they see, and tend to gravitate toward faces that are sweet, kind and relatable—and can be turned off by those that are mean or angry.

> *"I have a pretty good 'gut' sense of who is reputable and who is not. **I can just sense who is the real deal and who is in it for self-serving, opportunistic reasons.** ... Sometimes things like writing style, quality of work produced, who else is following them and where their work appears can speak into how trustworthy they are or aren't."*
>
> **- Gen X**

Americans are paying attention to messages from confident, passionate and authentic storytellers.

Trusted messengers, as heard in the qualitative phase, are:

- Insightful and articulate.
- Gifted with descriptive or visual storytelling abilities.
- Clear and confident, not timid or confusing.
- Patient, persevering, calm, collected.
- Passionate, compassionate and not self-serving.

> *"These need to be people who **show their beliefs with action, and not just words.** They need to be people who demonstrate compassion, understanding and listening to all people."*
>
> **- Gen Z**

How do Americans take action for key social issues, and who helps persuade them?

In general, Americans turn to those they deem trustworthy, honest, consistent and unbiased when actively seeking information around social issues in their lives and/or communities: close family and friends. Doctors and scientists. Key local leaders. But how do these trusted messengers differ when it comes to specific topics or issues?

This section looks at trusted messengers across six current and relevant topics affecting Americans: voting/democracy, health/wellness, mental health, racial equity & justice, climate change and addiction.

Americans feel more informed about and are more engaged with voting/democracy and health/wellness compared to other issues.

More than half of Americans say they feel extremely or very informed about voting/democracy (53%) and health/wellness (51%), followed by mental health (48%). Racial equity & justice, climate change and addiction all garnered similar responses (44%, 43% and 43%, respectively).

NOTE: The survey did not ask respondents what their knowledge of an issue is, only how informed they feel about the issue. On the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic and with the midterm elections, voting/democracy and health/wellness have certainly been popular topics over the past year, perhaps more than the others.

The same two issues top the list for those Americans say they're most engaged or passionate about, though health/wellness (53%) took the top spot over voting/democracy (50%). Fewer say they're engaged overall with the issue of addiction (35%) compared to the other topics.

## % Extremely / Very Informed

	Key Topic Average	Voting/ Democracy (A)	Health/ Wellness (B)	Mental Health (C)	Racial Equity & Justice (D)	Climate Change (E)	Addiction (F)
Total	47%	53%	51%	48%	44%	43%	43%
Fall 2021 %Extremely/Very	n/a	n/a	n/a	47%	44%	44%	42%
Very Informed / Extremely Informed	31% / 16%	35% / 18%	36% / 15%	32% / 16%	30% / 14%	29% / 14%	27% / 16%

Legend:
- **Extremely Informed**
- **Very Informed**
- **Fall 2021 %Extremely/Very**

% Extremely / Very Engaged

	Key Topic Average	Voting/ Democracy (A)	Health/ Wellness (B)	Mental Health (C)	Racial Equity & Justice (D)	Climate Change (E)	Addiction (F)
Total	45%	50%	53%	48%	40%	42%	35%
Fall 2021 %Extremely/Very	n/a	n/a	n/a	47%	41%	41%	33%
Very Engaged / Extremely Engaged	27% / 18%	29% / 21%	33% / 20%	29% / 19%	24% / 16%	25% / 17%	21% / 14%

Legend:
- **Extremely Engaged**
- **Very Engaged**
- **Fall 2021 %Extremely/Very**

By Generation

By generation, more millennials say they are informed and engaged with most social issues/topics, though Baby Boomers claim to be the most informed about voting/democracy.

% Extremely / Very Informed

	Gen Pop	Gen-Z (A)	Millennials (B)	Gen X (C)	Baby Boomer (D)
Voting/Democracy	53%	42%	55% AC	46%	60% AC
Health/Wellness	51%	49%	58% ACD	47%	48%
Mental Health	48%	52% D	59% CD	47% D	35%
Racial Equity & Justice	44%	45%	53% ACD	38%	38%
Climate Change	43%	43%	48% C	37%	44% C
Addiction	43%	39%	54% ACD	43% D	33%

% Extremely / Very Engaged

	Gen Pop	Gen-Z (A)	Millennials (B)	Gen X (C)	Baby Boomer (D)
Health/Wellness	53%	50%	59% ACD	51%	51%
Voting/Democracy	50%	43%	47%	43%	62% ABC
Mental health	48%	53% D	58% CD	46% D	36%
Climate Change	42%	43%	49% CD	36%	39%
Racial Equity & Justice	40%	46% CD	49% CD	34%	33%
Addiction	35%	40% CD	48% ACD	32% D	22%
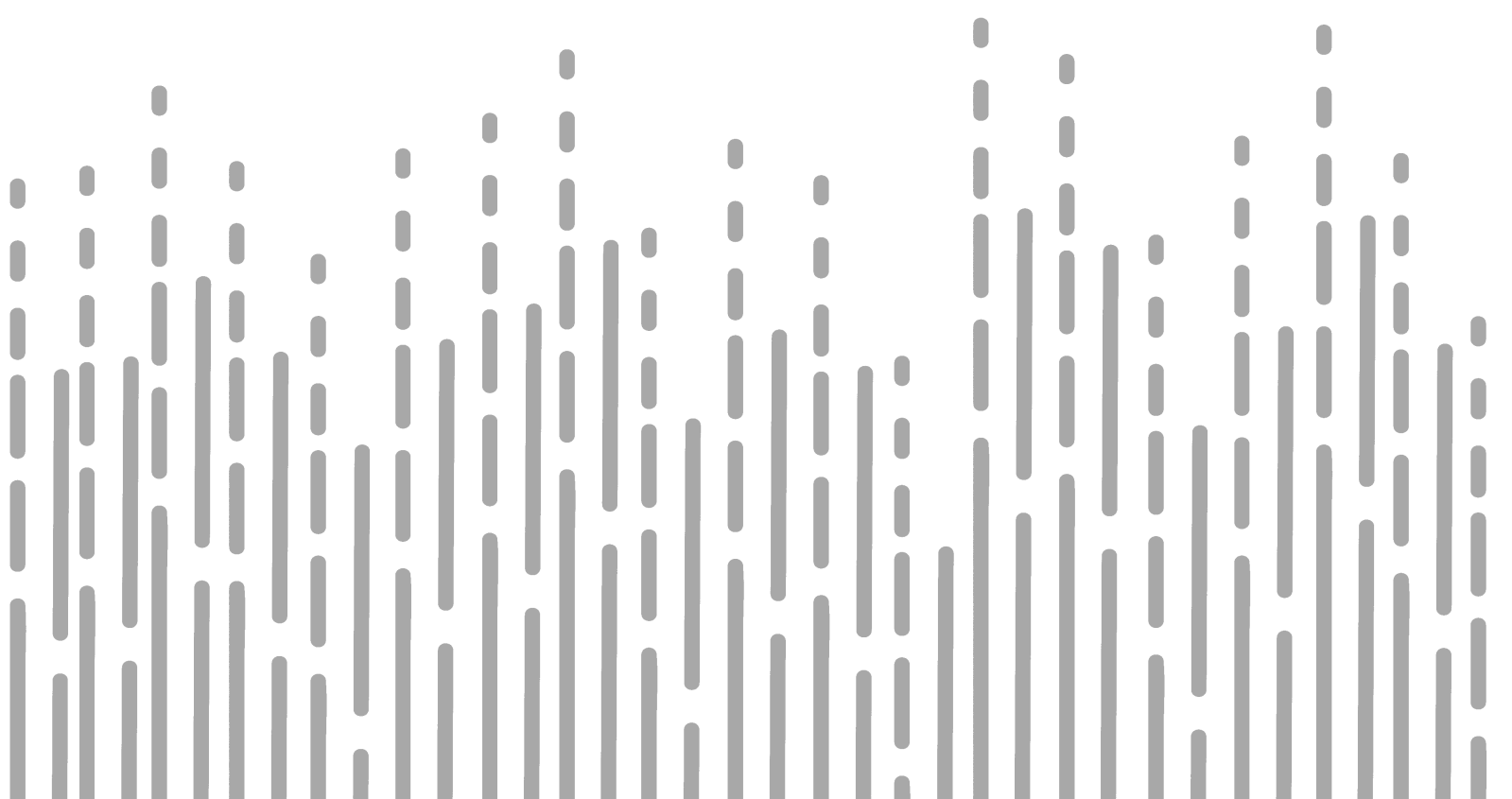
By Race/Ethnicity

Black, Hispanic and Asian respondents are generally more informed and engaged in most social issues/topics, especially those who are Black. White respondents are more informed of and engaged with voting/democracy than all races/ethnicities except Black respondents.

% Extremely / Very Informed

	Gen Pop	Caucasian (A)	Hispanic (B)	Black (C)	Asian (D)	Mixed Race (E)	Other Race (F)
Voting/Democracy	53%	53% DE	48%	63% ABDEF	43%	44%	45%
Health/Wellness	51%	50%	53%	58% A	51%	50%	51%
Mental Health	48%	46%	52% A	56% AD	45%	49%	47%
Racial Equity & Justice	44%	40%	49% A	62% ABDF	42%	52% A	42%
Climate Change	43%	42%	47%	49% AE	46%	38%	43%
Addiction	43%	41%	44%	54% ABDF	39%	53% ADF	39%

% Extremely / Very Engaged

	Gen Pop	Caucasian (A)	Hispanic (B)	Black (C)	Asian (D)	Mixed Race (E)	Other Race (F)
Health/Wellness	53%	53%	55%	59% AF	55%	51%	47%
Voting/Democracy	50%	51% EF	47%	56% BDEF	45%	40%	41%
Mental Health	48%	47%	53% AF	57% ADF	47%	54% F	39%
Climate Change	42%	40%	51% AE	50% AE	48% AE	32%	42% E
Racial Equity & Justice	40%	36%	49% AD	60% ABDEF	39%	48% A	42%
Addiction	35%	32%	42% AF	48% ADEF	36%	33%	32%

Overall top trusted messengers do not change by social issue, though some elicit stronger *associations* depending on the content.

When seeking to remain informed on a key topic, some trends among associated messengers (not necessarily levels of trust) can be discerned by overall topic. For example, doctors/medical professionals, as well as some celebrities and athletes, are associated with health/wellness, mental health and addiction issues. Scientists and messengers from the federal government are more associated with climate change information, whereas Americans turn to local leaders, news commentators/journalists and some national messengers for information around racial equity & justice and voting/democracy.

Trusted Messengers for Remaining Informed by Topic [Messenger/Topic Associations]

Doctors/medical professionals are used for health/wellness, mental health and addiction issues, as well as some celebrities and athletes; these topics are viewed similarly.

Messengers from the federal government, as well as scientists are more associated with climate change information.

· Scientists

CLIMATE CHANGE

· Professors/Academic Experts

· Professors/Academic Experts

· Authors

· Federal Government Agency Representatives

· *National News Anchor*

· National Journalists

· Doctors/ Medical Professionals

HEALTH & WELLNESS

· Music Celebrities

ADDICTION

MENTAL HEALTH

· *Spouse/Partner*

· Athletes

· *Immediate Family Members*

· *Close Friends*

· Church members

· Social Media Influencers
· Podcast Hosts
· Authors
· Pastor/Religious Leader
· Hollywood Film Celebrities

· Local News Anchor
· Local Journalists
· Town/City Mayors

VOTING/ DEMOCRACY

RACIAL EQUITY & JUSTICE

· Local Representative

Racial equity & justice and voting/democracy are viewed similarly, with people turning to local leaders, news commentators/journalists and some national messengers.

And although the top reasons for trusting a person are consistent, there are some stronger associations for trusting specific messengers when seeking to remain informed: Doctors, scientists, academic experts and non-profit organizations are trusted because they are credentialed, up-to-date and are seen as leaders. Family members and close friends share similar views, have a person's best interest in mind and have always been their "go-to messenger". National news messengers are a popular voice and have a larger following (as do social media friends).

Reasons for Trusting Messengers for Remaining Informed – Among the top trusted messengers

National news messengers are a popular voice, and have a larger following (along with social media friends).

Family member and close friends share similar views, have their best interest in mind and have always been their go-to messenger.

· They have a lot of social media followers

· They're a popular national voice

· *Social Media Friend*

· They're a popular local voice

· They're a government official

· *National News Anchor*

· They're members of my local community

· Values/views are similar to mine

· *National News Commentator/Show Hosts*

· *Present multiple points of view*

· Present information that no one else is talking about/sharing

· *Close Friends*

· It's who I've always gone to

· Someone I know recommends them

· *Immediate Family Members*

· *Consistent*

· *Spouse/Partner*

· *Other Family Members*

· They're a Leader

· *Unbiased*

· *I Trust Them for Other Information*

· *Non-Profit Organizations/Groups*

· *Honest Record*

· They have my best interest in mind

· *Independent*

· *Doctor/Medical Professional*

· Always up-to-date   · *Professor/Academic Expert*

· *Scientists*

· They're credentialed experts/ use reliable experts or organizations

Doctors, scientists, academic experts, non-profit orgs are trusted because they are credentialed, up-to-date and are seen as leaders.

A perceptual map is a method of analyzing messenger or topic perceptions through the graphical representation of the association between messengers and topics or messengers and reasons. In these maps, messenger/topic or messenger/reasons close together imply similarities. Messenger/topic/reasons close to the center lack differentiation. Overall, the messengers/topics that are similar across most attributes appear closer together on the map, while messengers/topics that are most different appear far apart. In other words, it illustrates which attributes differentiate the messengers/topics in respondents' minds.
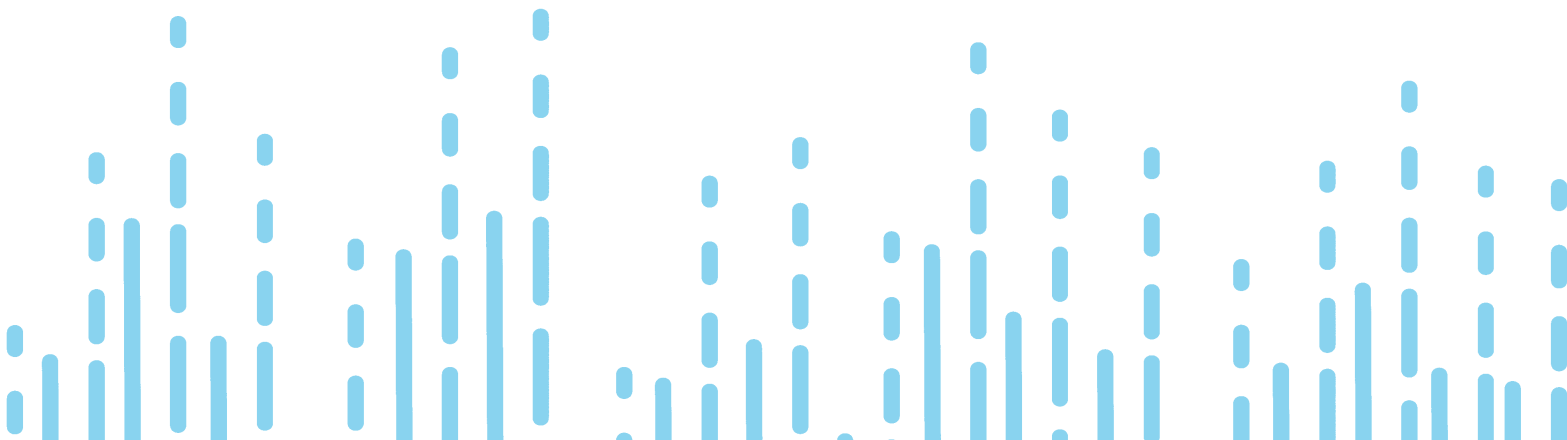
Americans have most taken action for health/wellness, mental health and climate change.

Health/wellness again tops the list for the issue that has inspired the most action (45%), followed by mental health (39%) and climate change (37%). Regardless of issue, about a quarter of Americans say they have thought about taking action.

Demographically, younger generations are more likely to have taken action across all issues. White respondents are least likely to have taken action compared to other races/ethnicities; half of Hispanic and Black Americans have taken action for racial equity/justice.

Taken Action to Help on Topic Issues

Legend:
- Taken Action
- Thought About Taking Action

62%	60%	68%	66%	58%	65%	56%
25% / 37%	24% / 36%	23% / 45%	27% / 39%	25% / 33%	28% / 37%	21% / 35%
Key Topic Average	Voting/ Democracy (A)	Health/ Wellness (B)	Mental Health (C)	Racial Equity & Justice (D)	Climate Change (E)	Addiction (F)
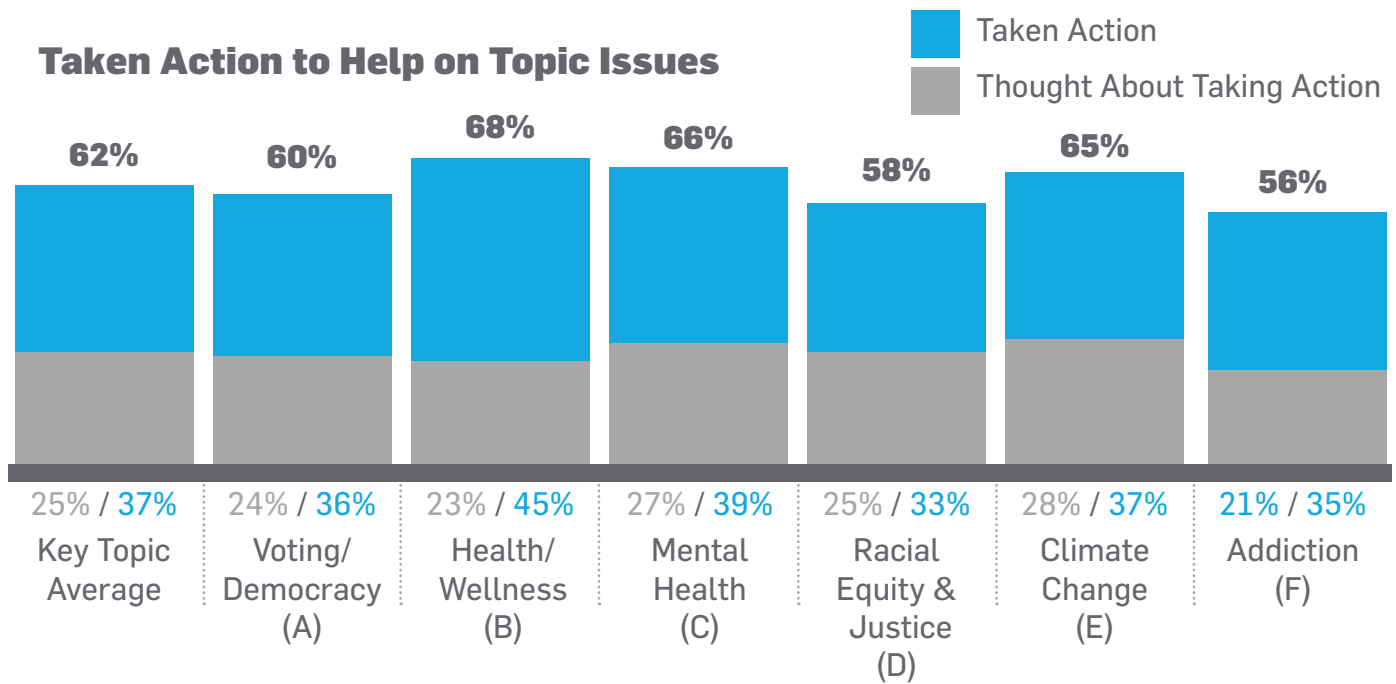
Most Americans say they have not recently changed their stance or opinion on a topic.

A quarter or fewer of Americans have recently changed their stance or opinion on a social issue lately (with health/wellness at the top). For those who have, the shift was most often induced by learning more about the issue (by themselves or from someone they trusted whom they personally know). Changes to an opinion around health/wellness or mental health was also motivated by a personal experience; opinion shifts around addiction were most caused by meeting someone in-person who experienced or was impacted by it.

Notably, younger generations (especially Gen Z) are more likely to have changed their stance recently, while white respondents are less likely to have changed theirs.

Changed Stance/Opinion on Topic Recently

Voting/ Democracy (A)	Health / Wellness (B)	Mental Health (C)	Racial Equity & Justice (D)	Climate Change (E)	Addiction (F)
18%	25% ADF	23% AF	19%	21%	17%
	Why Stance/Opinion Was Changed				
Learned more about this issue on my own					
45%	40%	42%	41%	33%	34%
Learned more about this issue from someone I trust whom I personally know					
35%	42%	43%	38%	35%	36%
Met someone in-person who experienced/was impacted by this issue					
34%	27%	43%	32%	30%	49%
I had a personal experience/was impacted by this issue					
29%	42%	38%	31%	35%	34%
Met someone online / on social media who experienced/was impacted by this issue					
23%	18%	27%	17%	17%	21%
Learned more about this issue from someone I trust whom I do not personally know					
22%	25%	20%	20%	24%	28%

What messengers, information and actions move the needle on select social issues?

Voting/Democracy

For information around voting/democracy, Americans turn to news messengers, as well as family and friends. Government politicians/representatives also play notable roles in generating awareness and inspiring action for this topic.

Two-thirds (66%) of Americans say they actively seek out information on voting/democracy, though only about a third (36%) have taken action (which was most motivated by family/close friends, national news anchors or non-profit organizations). Eighteen percent say they've recently changed their stance on this topic, mostly due to learning more on their own.

Voting/Democracy Summary

· News messengers (local, national) and family/friends are relied on for information, regardless of level.
· About 1 in 5 have changed their opinion recently, mainly driven by seeking more information on their own.

Messenger Ecosystem

HELP YOU BECOME AWARE OF AN ISSUE	PROVIDE VALID INFORMATION TO YOU	HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS
· National anchor/journalists/commentators · Family/close friends · Fed gov't politicians/reps · Local anchors/commentators · Local officials/governors/state reps · City council members · Teachers · *Gen-Z: also more mayors, social media friends, local reps, local journalists*	· Family/close friends · Professor/teachers · Religious leaders · National journalists/anchors · Local news anchors · Non-profit organizations/groups · *Gen-Z: also more mayors, sate reps, governors, local reps, local journalists & podcast hosts*	· Family/close friends · National anchors/journalists/commentators · Local anchors/commentators/journalists · Fed gov't politicians/reps · Local gov't politicians · *Gen-Z: also social media friends, state reps, local community leaders, celebrities, mayors*

How I Get Information

Actively seek out info **66%**
Based on who I follow/subscribe to **43%**
Do not keep updated **14%**

Taking Action

Taken Action **36%**
Thought About It **24%**
No Action **40%**

Changed Stance/Opinion

18% changed their stance/opinion recently

What Caused the Opinion Change?

Learned more on my own **45%**
Learned more from someone I trust / know **35%**
Met someone in-person who experienced/impacted by this issue **34%**
Personal experience/impacted by this issue **29%**
Learned more from someone I trust / don't know **22%**
Met someone online who experienced/impacted by this issue **23%**

How I Changed Opinion/Stance

Shared own experience(s) **55%**
Shared facts **43%**
Had a conversation **41%**
Addressed my questions **39%**

Health/Wellness

Americans rely on friends/family and experts (medical professionals, scientists, professors) for health/wellness information across the entire knowledge journey: awareness, information gathering, remaining informed/making a decision.

The majority (73%) say they actively seek out information on health/wellness, and 45% have taken action for the issue (which was motivated by medical professionals, spouse/family, friends or scientists). Twenty-five percent say they've recently changed their stance on this topic (due to a personal experience, learning more from someone they know and trust, or learning more on their own).

Health/Wellness Summary

- Experts (medical, scientists, professors) and family/friends are relied on for information, regardless of level—and they also are the messengers who inspire action.
- 1 in 4 have changed their opinion recently, mainly driven by personal experiences and seeking more information on their own/close connection.

Messenger Ecosystem

HELP YOU BECOME AWARE OF AN ISSUE	PROVIDE VALID INFORMATION TO YOU	HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS
· Medical professionals, scientists	· Medical professionals, scientists	· Medical professionals, scientists
· Family/close friends	· Family/close friends	· Family/close friends
· National news anchors	· Professors/teachers	· National news anchor
· Non-profit organizations/ groups	· Religious leaders	· Professors
· Social media friend		
· Professors		

How I Get Information
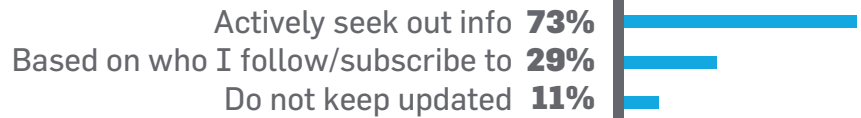
Actively seek out info **73%**
Based on who I follow/subscribe to **29%**
Do not keep updated **11%**

Taking Action

Taken Action **45%**
Thought About It **23%**
No Action **32%**

Changed Stance/Opinion

25% changed their stance/opinion recently

What Caused the Opinion Change?

Personal experience/impacted by this issue **42%**
Learned more from someone I trust / know **42%**
Learned more on my own **40%**
Met someone in-person who experienced/impacted by this issue **27%**
Learned more from someone I trust / don't know **25%**
Met someone online who experienced/impacted by this issue **18%**

How I Changed Opinion/Stance

Shared own experience(s) **57%**
Had a conversation **49%**
Shared facts **45%**
Addressed my questions **41%**
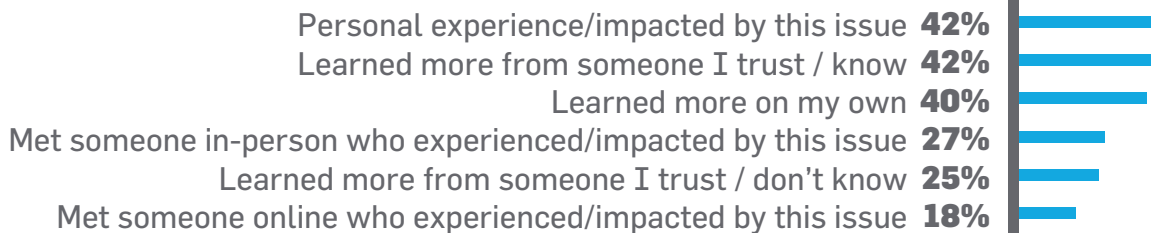
Mental Health

Like for health/wellness, Americans rely on friends/family and experts for mental health information across the entire knowledge journey—as well as non-profit organizations.

Nearly two-thirds (63%) say they actively seek out information on mental health, and 39% have taken action (which was motivated by family/close friends and medical professionals). Less than a quarter (23%) say they've recently changed their stance on this topic, primarily as a result of learning more from themselves or someone they know and trust, or meeting someone in-person who experienced or has been impacted by this issue.

Mental Health Summary

- Experts (medical, scientists) and family/friends are relied on for information, regardless of level – and they also are the messengers who inspire action.
- 1 in 4 have changed their opinion recently, mainly driven by seeking more information or meeting someone impacted by mental health (who shared their experience).

Messenger Ecosystem

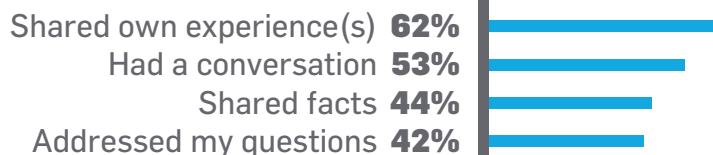| HELP YOU BECOME AWARE OF AN ISSUE	PROVIDE VALID INFORMATION TO YOU	HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS
· Medical professionals, scientists · Family/close friends · National news anchors · Social media friend · Teachers/professors · Non-profit organizations/ groups	· Medical professionals, scientists · Family/close friends · Teachers/professors · Religious leaders/church members · Non-profit organizations/ groups · Parent's group	· Medical professionals, scientists · Family/close friends · Professor · Non-profit organizations/ groups · National news anchor · Social media friend

How I Get Information

Actively seek out info **63%**
Based on who I follow/subscribe to **31%**
Do not keep updated **19%**

Taking Action

Taken Action **39%**
Thought About It **27%**
No Action **34%**
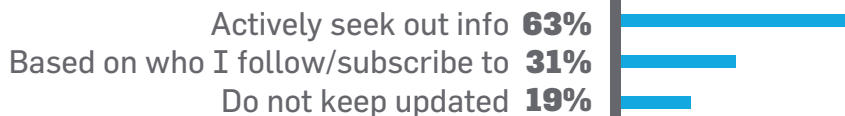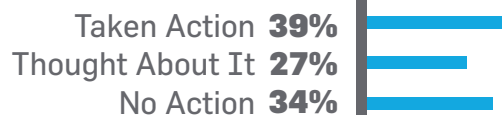
Changed Stance/Opinion

23% changed their stance/opinion recently

What Caused the Opinion Change?

Learned more from someone I trust / know **43%**
Met someone in-person who experienced/impacted by this issue **43%**
Learned more on my own **42%**
Personal experience/impacted by this issue **38%**
Met someone online who experienced/impacted by this issue **27%**
Learned more from someone I trust / don't know **20%**

How I Changed Opinion/Stance

Shared own experience(s) **62%**
Had a conversation **53%**
Shared facts **44%**
Addressed my questions **42%**
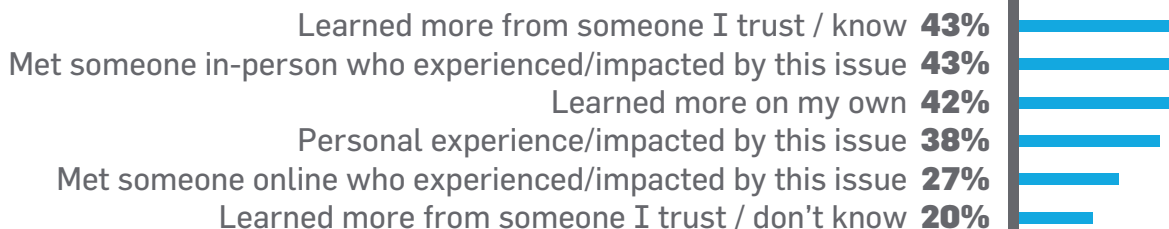
Racial Equity & Justice

For issues of racial equity & justice, Americans rely on friends/family and non-profit organizations most across the entire knowledge journey. Black and Asian Americans are more likely to turn to celebrities, religious leaders/church members and local community leaders for awareness; local representatives and authors for information gathering; and additional messengers for making decisions than the general population.

Fifty-eight percent say they actively seek out information on racial equity & justice, and 33% have taken action (most motivated by family/close friends and national news anchors). Only 19% say they've recently changed their stance on this topic, primarily as a result of learning more from themselves or from someone they know and trust.

Racial Equity & Justice Summary

- Family/friends and non-profit groups are relied on for information, regardless of level; with friends/family sparking action.
- 1 in 5 have changed their opinion recently, mainly driven by seeking more information and having conversations.

Messenger Ecosystem

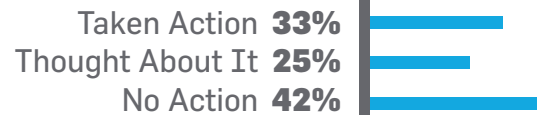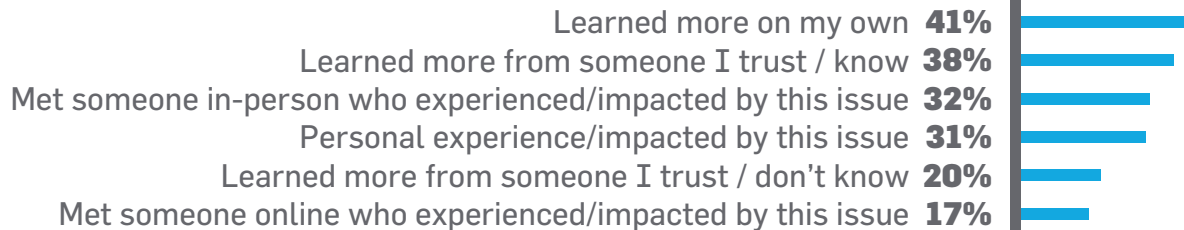| HELP YOU BECOME AWARE OF AN ISSUE	PROVIDE VALID INFORMATION TO YOU	HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS
• National anchors/commentors/journalists • Family/close friends • Local anchors/commentators/journalists • Social media friends • Non-profit organizations/groups • *Black people: also more celebrities, religious leaders, local community leaders* • *Asian people: also more celebrities, local community leaders, church members & athletes*	• Family/close friends • Scientists • Professors/teachers • Religious leaders/Church members • Non-profit organizations/groups • National journalists • *Black people: also more parents' groups, local reps/community leaders, authors* • *Asian people: also more local reps, mayors, celebrities & authors*	• National anchors/commentors • Family/close friends • Social media friends • Local anchors/commentators/journalists • Non-profit organizations/groups • *Black people: also more social media influencers & local community leaders* • *Asian people: also more athletes*

How I Get Information

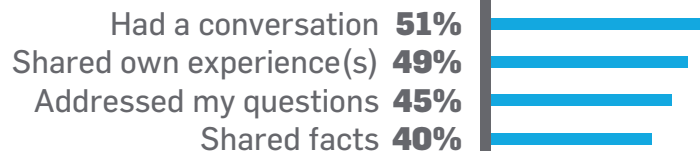Actively seek out info **58%**
Based on who I follow/subscribe to **33%**
Do not keep updated **21%**

Taking Action

Taken Action **33%**
Thought About It **25%**
No Action **42%**
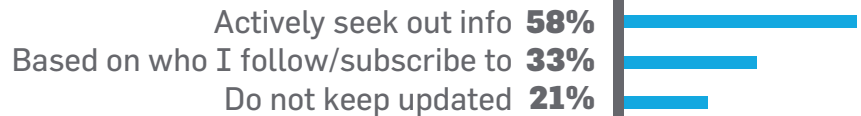
Changed Stance/Opinion

19% changed their stance/opinion recently

What Caused the Opinion Change

Learned more on my own **41%**
Learned more from someone I trust / know **38%**
Met someone in-person who experienced/impacted by this issue **32%**
Personal experience/impacted by this issue **31%**
Learned more from someone I trust / don't know **20%**
Met someone online who experienced/impacted by this issue **17%**

How I Changed Opinion/Stance

Had a conversation **51%**
Shared own experience(s) **49%**
Addressed my questions **45%**
Shared facts **40%**

Climate Change

When it comes to climate change, Americans most turn to experts, national news messengers and family/friends. These messengers are also the most likely to inspire action. Non-profit organizations are also trusted for information gathering and remaining informed/making decisions.

Fifty-seven percent say they actively seek out information on climate change, and 37% have taken action. Only 19% say they've recently changed their stance on this topic, primarily as a result of a personal experience or after learning more from themselves or someone they know and trust.

Climate Change Summary

- Experts (scientists, professors), family/friends and national news messengers are relied on for information, regardless of level—and they also are the messengers who inspire action.
- 1 in 5 have changed their opinion recently, mainly driven by seeking more information.

Messenger Ecosystem

HELP YOU BECOME AWARE OF AN ISSUE	PROVIDE VALID INFORMATION TO YOU	HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS
· Scientists	· Scientists	· Scientists
· National anchor/ commentator/journalist	· Family/friends	· National anchor/ commentator/journalists
· Fed gov't reps/politicians	· Professors/teachers	· Professors
· Local anchor/commentors	· Medical experts	· Family/friends
· Professor	· Non-profit organizations/ groups	· Local anchor
· Social media friend/ influencers	· National anchor/ journalists/commentators	· Fed gov't reps/politicians
· Family/friends	· Religious leaders	· Non-profit organizations/ groups

How I Get Information
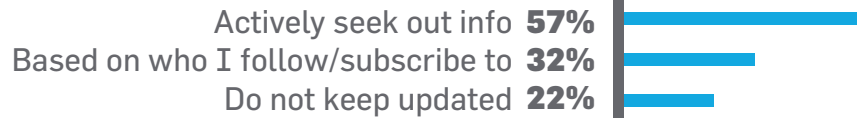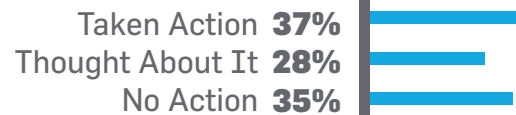
Actively seek out info **57%**
Based on who I follow/subscribe to **32%**
Do not keep updated **22%**

Taking Action

Taken Action **37%**
Thought About It **28%**
No Action **35%**

Changed Stance/Opinion

25% changed their stance/opinion recently

What Caused the Opinion Change?

Personal experience/impacted by this issue **35%**
Learned more from someone I trust / know **35%**
Learned more on my own **33%**
Met someone in-person who experienced/impacted by this issue **30%**
Learned more from someone I trust / don't know **24%**
Met someone online who experienced/impacted by this issue **17%**

How I Changed Opinion/Stance

Shared own experience(s) **52%**
Shared facts **45%**
Had a conversation **42%**
Addressed my questions **33%**
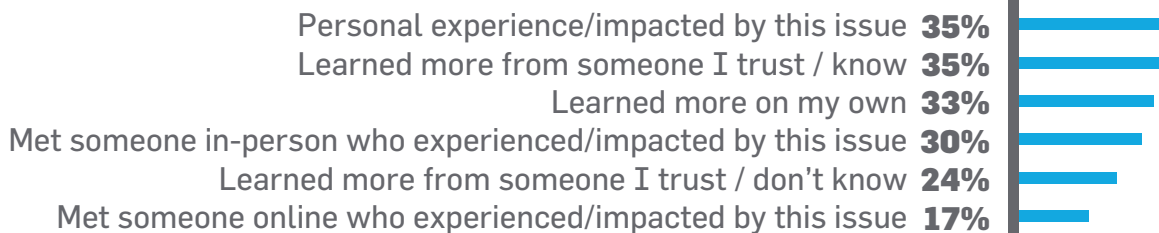
Addiction

Americans most rely on family/close friends, experts and non-profit organizations for information on addiction. Just over half actively seek out information on addiction, and 35% have taken action (which was motivated by family/close friends and medical professionals). Just 17% say they've recently changed their stance on this topic, mostly as a result of meeting someone in-person who has experienced or been impacted by this issue.

Addiction Summary

- Family/friends and experts are relied on for information, regardless of level—and they also are the messengers who inspire action.
- 1 in 6 have changed their opinion, sparked by meeting someone who shared their experience/facts.

Messenger Ecosystem

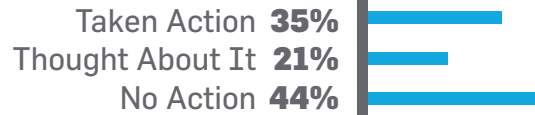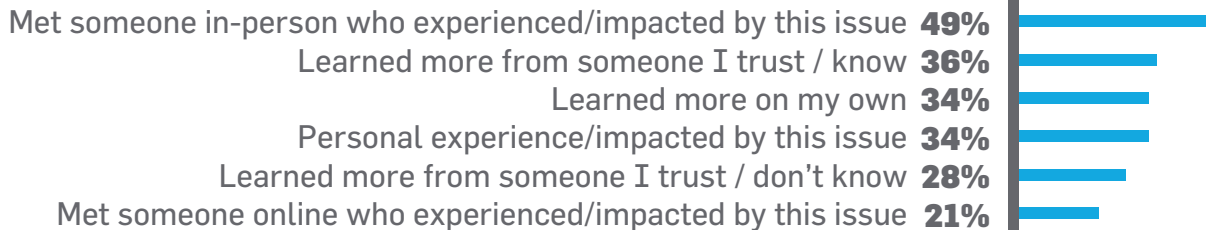| HELP YOU BECOME AWARE OF AN ISSUE	PROVIDE VALID INFORMATION TO YOU	HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS
· Family/close friends, acquaintances · Medical professionals, scientists · National anchors/commentators · Local news anchor · Social media friend · Teachers · Non-profit organizations/groups	· Family/close friends · Medical professionals, scientists · Teachers/professors · Religious leaders/church members · Non-profit organizations/groups · Parents groups	· Family/close friends · Medical professionals, scientists · Professors · National news anchor · Non-profit organizations/groups · Social media friend
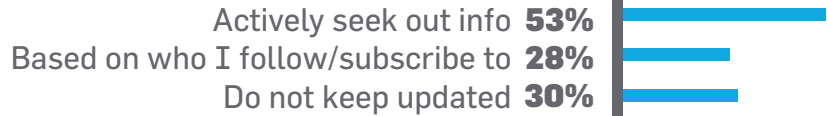
How I Get Information
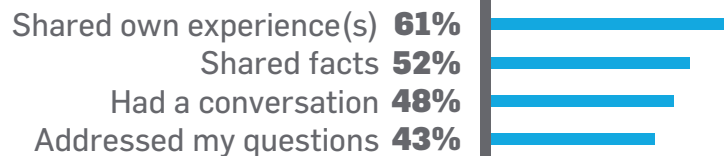
Actively seek out info **53%**
Based on who I follow/subscribe to **28%**
Do not keep updated **30%**

Taking Action

Taken Action **35%**
Thought About It **21%**
No Action **44%**

Changed Stance/Opinion

25% changed their stance/opinion recently

What Caused the Opinion Change?

Met someone in-person who experienced/impacted by this issue **49%**
Learned more from someone I trust / know **36%**
Learned more on my own **34%**
Personal experience/impacted by this issue **34%**
Learned more from someone I trust / don't know **28%**
Met someone online who experienced/impacted by this issue **21%**

How I Changed Opinion/Stance

Shared own experience(s) **61%**
Shared facts **52%**
Had a conversation **48%**
Addressed my questions **43%**

Key Insights

From both the qualitative and quantitative phases, the research team identified four key insights.

Insight 1:
The closer a messenger is to a person, the more they trust them in later stages of the knowledge journey.

As a person moves through the knowledge journey from awareness to understanding to remaining informed/taking action, they continually turn to (and trust) those closest to them—as well as experts like doctors/medical professionals and scientists. An exception here is news messengers (local and national), whom Americans turn to both in the initial awareness stage and later, for remaining informed.

Insight 2:
Younger Americans—especially Gen Z—are more likely to trust social media influencers and celebrities across all stages of the knowledge journey.

Younger Americans, particularly Gen Z, are much more likely than older generations to trust broader influencers (social media influencers, celebrities, podcast hosts, athletes, etc.) when becoming aware of an issue, gathering more information and remaining informed/taking action.

Insight 3:
Trust in scientists, professionals and academics remains very low among Republicans.

Like in 2021, the 2022 study saw significant differences by political affiliation in the trusted messengers Americans turn to for more information. Democrats regularly turn to experts and professionals for information (doctors, scientists, academic experts, teachers)—as well as non-profit organizations. Republicans are much less likely to trust these individuals for information, and instead are more likely to trust pastors/religious leaders.

Insight 4:
Americans in urban areas are much more trusting overall than those in other areas.

Individuals living in urban areas have much more trust in all messengers than those in rural or suburban areas, especially with doctors/medical professionals, scientists, professors/academic experts and teachers/school leaders. The only messenger with similar levels of trust between urban and rural Americans is pastors/religious leaders.

Recommendations

from Creators for Good

RECOMMENDATION 1:
Pick your messengers carefully.

Not all types of people are considered trusted messengers, and they often vary by topic. When considering the most trusted messenger(s) for your cause or campaign, first identify all relevant participants within the ecosystem of the issue. Then select the messenger(s) who will deliver the right message against each goal, based upon their degree of trust within the content of the topic or category. For example, celebrity X may be crucial in generating broad awareness and urgency to get a flu shot, but doctors and pharmacists will help drive appointment sign-ups.

RECOMMENDATION 2:
Meet your audience where they are along the knowledge journey.

Behavior change doesn't happen in a day. Meet your audience where they are along the knowledge journey (awareness, information gathering, remaining informed/making a decision) by developing an evergreen influencer strategy that will reach them at each stage. This should include both the messenger type and the message being delivered. For example, someone who's just becoming aware of an issue isn't ready to begin taking action for it. Ensure messengers and messages are aligned throughout the entire journey.

Refer to our Messenger Ecosystem Diagram for broad categories of messengers to leverage along the journey, and work with them to create content that speaks to each stage.

RECOMMENDATION 3:
### Leverage trusted messengers to develop the creative strategy, not just activate it.

Don't view messengers as solely message deliverers! Depending on their role, their expertise and their closeness to the audience you're trying to reach, trusted messengers can also play a vital role in developing your campaign's creative strategy—in addition to activating it.

For example, if your campaign's social media influencer already has strong ideas on how to talk to their followers to generate broad awareness, leverage those ideas for the awareness stage. If the campaign leverages a scientist to help your audience gather more information about climate change, get their expert opinion on the message and delivery—and how to leverage additional scientists.

RECOMMENDATION 4:
Use the outer circle to influence the inner circle.

Finally, don't forget to influence the influencers. This study reiterated that one's inner circle is the most trusted type of messenger. As such, a potential campaign strategy could be to focus on influencing both the target audience and also the potential inner circles of the target audiences through messengers from the outer circle with broader reach.
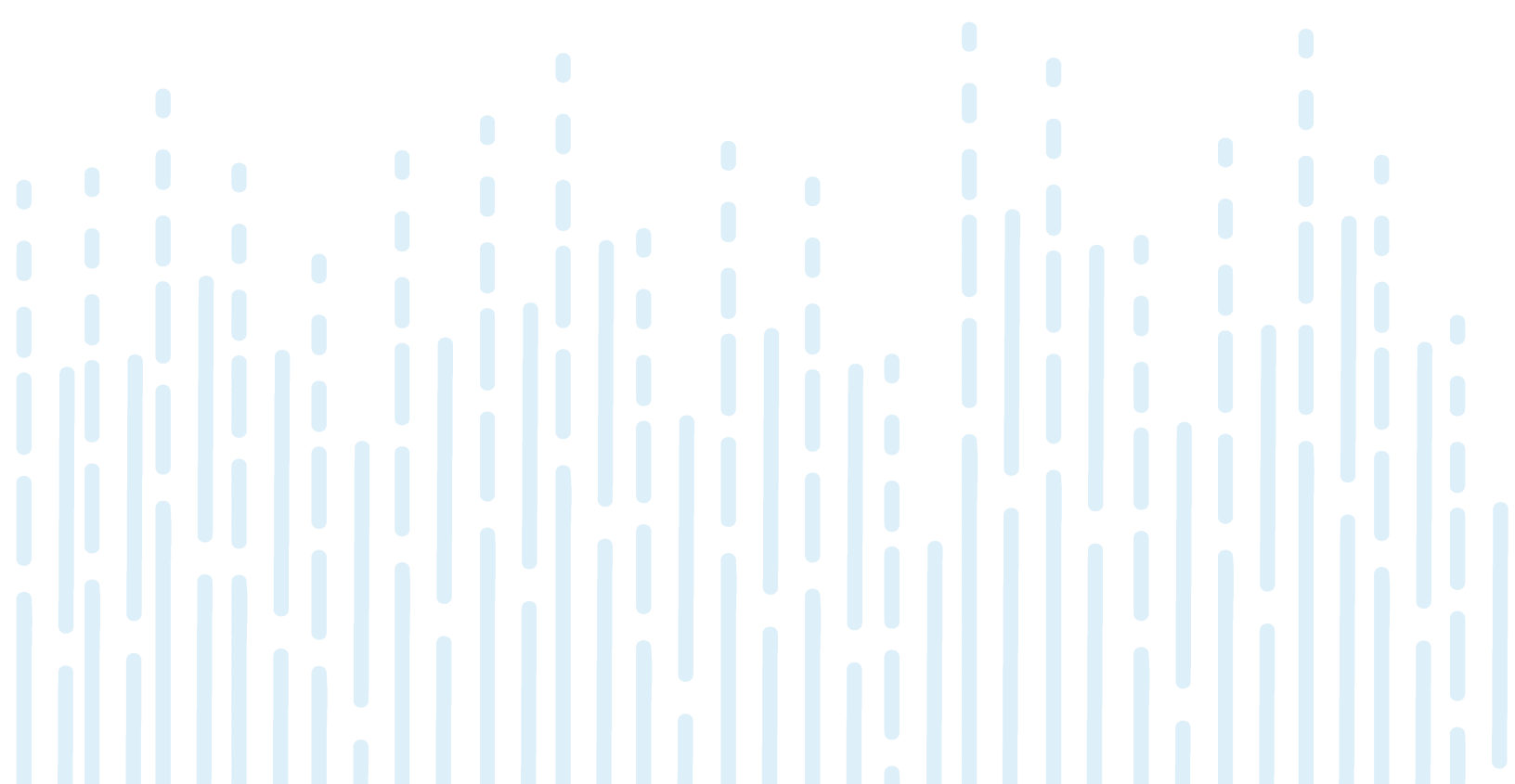
Conclusion

In a climate where distrust may be termed as "society's default emotion," who, then, do we trust—particularly when it comes to becoming aware, understanding and remaining informed about a key social issue?

Unchanging from last year's study, Americans are still seeking the advice and opinions of people they trust for information on key social issues, those they deem honest, consistent, informed and unbiased. They're most overwhelmingly turning to the people closest to them (spouse, friend, family), as well as experts (doctors, scientists, accredited professionals) and news messengers.

In today's era of influence, brands and causes must work to identify, prepare and leverage these trusted messengers across each phase of the knowledge journey if they want to truly generate knowledge, shift attitudes, and drive desired behaviors for the social issues on which they work.