

SmartNews Misinformation Survey Findings 2025

National Data

Americans are increasingly alarmed by attempts to mislead them ahead of this midterm election cycle. Ninety-two percent of U.S. adults are concerned about efforts to mislead voters – a worry that transcends party lines.

- Democrats: 95% concerned, 5% not concerned
- Republicans: 92% concerned, 8% not concerned
- Independents: 88% concerned, 12% not concerned

Misinformation dread is setting in, and AI is exacerbating the issue. Two-thirds of adults (67%) say they are encountering more misinformation than a year ago, and growing concerns about AI, combined with declining confidence in spotting false information, are leaving voters increasingly uneasy.

- Nearly all adults surveyed (91%) are at least somewhat worried that AI-generated falsehoods could influence the 2025 election.
 - Concern about AI's influence cuts across all demographics, with nearly 90% of every generation reporting concern: 91% of Boomers, 90% of Gen X, 92% of Millennials and 91% Gen Z
 - Concern that AI will influence the upcoming election is similarly high across party lines: 94% of Democrats, 93% of Republicans and 86% of Independents say they are concerned.
- Despite these fears, and with misinformation on the rise, confidence in spotting misinformation is incredibly low: only 10% of adults feel extremely confident in their ability to identify it.

Americans trust local journalism, but still rely on social media to source information. Social media remains the least trusted source of news and information overall: 51% of adults rank it lowest for trustworthiness and 46% cite social platforms and influencers as the most concerning source of misinformation.

- Trust divides sharply by generation:
 - Boomers (63%) and Gen X (52%) are most likely to distrust social media.
 - Meanwhile, Millennials and Gen Z are slightly less skeptical of social media (both at 45%)
- Local outlets remain the most trusted: About one third (32%) of Americans say they rely most on local TV and local newspapers – more than any other source of news.
- Yet, behavior doesn't always follow belief: 22% of adults rely on social media the most, despite ranking it the least trustworthy.

Local Market Data

California

- Californians are deeply worried about misinformation shaping the upcoming special election on Proposition 50. Nearly all (94%) of adults are concerned that misinformation will influence the statewide ballot measure on redistricting.
 - Democrats: 97% are concerned, 3% are not concerned
 - Republicans: 94% are concerned, 6% are not concerned
 - Independents: 74% are concerned, 26% are not concerned
- Concern is particularly strong among older generations (Boomers, Gen X and Millennials), while Gen Z is significantly less concerned:
 - Boomers: 95% are concerned, 5% are not concerned
 - Gen X: 93% are concerned, 7% are not concerned
 - Millennials: 94% are concerned, 6% are not concerned
 - Gen Z: 77% are concerned, 23% are not concerned
- Misinformation is becoming more visible and Californians are struggling to keep up: 70% believe misinformation has increased since the 2024 presidential election and more than half encounter it *daily*.
 - Concern about AI-driven misinformation is high: Three-quarters (75%) worry AI-generated falsehoods could shape election outcomes.
 - More than half (51%) believe AI will make it harder to identify misinformation.
 - Despite widespread concern, only 14% of respondents are extremely confident in their ability to spot misinformation.
 - When asked who should take responsibility for addressing misinformation, one-third (33%) say it's the government's job to address the problem.
- Social media is both central and suspect in California's information landscape. Californians surveyed are the most concerned about social media & influencers (42%), followed by political candidates (35%), as the sources of misinformation.
 - Generational and partisan divides are stark. Younger voters rely on social media despite recognizing its risks, while older Californians largely reject it as a credible source:
 - Gen Z (39%) and Millennials (33%) say social media is their most trusted source of news. By contrast, Boomers (61%) and Gen X (57%) overwhelmingly rank social media as their least trusted source.
 - Republicans (31%) say social media is their most trusted source of news, and Democrats (60%) say it is their least trusted source.

New Jersey

- Concern about misinformation runs deep in New Jersey. Nearly all adults (93%) are worried that misinformation could impact the upcoming election on November 4.
 - Democrats: 97% are concerned, 3% are not concerned
 - Republicans: 96% are concerned, 4% are not concerned
 - Independents: 74% concerned, 26% are not concerned
- Concern is consistent across generations:
 - Boomers: 94% concerned, 6% not concerned
 - Gen X: 93% concerned, 7% not concerned
 - Millennials: 92% concerned, 8% not concerned
 - Gen Z: 95% concerned, 5% not concerned
- New Jersey adults see more information and feel less equipped to counter it. More than half (53%) report encountering misinformation *daily*, and two-thirds say it has increased compared to last year's presidential election.
 - Concern about AI-driven misinformation is high: nearly three-quarters (73%) are worried that AI-generated misinformation could influence the election.
 - Despite near-universal concern, only 11% feel extremely confident in spotting false information.
 - When asked whose responsibility it is to address misinformation, 37% say the government should lead efforts to combat misinformation, while 23% believe that journalists should take primary responsibility.
- Trust is divided along generational and partisan lines. Overall, 43% cite social media and influencers are the main sources of misinformation, followed by political candidates (31%).
 - The partisan split is striking:
 - 40% of Democrats blame political candidates, compared to just 26% of Republicans and 25% of Independents.
 - 49% of Independents and 48% of Republicans cite social media as the leading source of misinformation, versus just 33% of Democrats.
 - When it comes to news trust, more than a quarter (26%) of Independents rank social media as their most trusted source – the highest of all parties.
 - 57% of Democrats and 51% of Republicans rank social media as their least trusted source of news.
 - Generationally, Boomers (61%) show the strongest distrust of social media overall.

New York City

- New Yorkers mirror national concern about misinformation, with 82% of adults expressing worry about attempts to mislead voters through fake news and misinformation ahead of the mayoral election on November 4.
 - Democrats: 88% are concerned, 12% are not concerned
 - Republicans: 84% are concerned, 16% are not concerned
 - Independents: 72% are concerned, 28% are not concerned
- Concern across generations is mixed, with Gen X showing the highest level of concern:
 - Boomers: 83% are concerned, 17% are not concerned
 - Gen X: 94% are concerned, 6% are not concerned
 - Millennials: 85% are concerned, 15% are not concerned
 - Gen Z: 81% are concerned, 19% are not concerned
- AI and information overload are fueling unease: Nearly half (43%) encounter false or misleading information online *daily* and 66% say misinformation has increased since last year's presidential election.
 - Concern about AI-driven misinformation is high, with 91% of New Yorkers expressing some level of concern about AI-generated misinformation influencing the election
 - More than half (51%) believe AI makes it harder to detect misinformation.
 - Despite widespread concern, only 12% feel extremely confident in their ability to spot falsehoods.
 - When asked who should take responsibility, more than one-third (35%) of New Yorkers believe the government should take primary responsibility for addressing misinformation, followed by one-quarter (25%) citing journalists.
- Social media is a double-edged sword in New York City. New Yorkers surveyed are most concerned about social media and influencers (42%) as sources of misinformation, followed by political candidates (34%) and their supporters (19%). Only 6% cite foreign governments, reinforcing that misinformation is viewed as a domestic problem rather than an international one.
 - Younger New Yorkers continue to rely heavily on social media, even as they recognize its credibility challenges, while older generations overwhelmingly reject it as a trustworthy source of news.
 - Gen Z (36%) and Millennials (28%) name social media as their most trusted source of news.
 - Boomers (61%) and Gen X (48%) overwhelmingly rank social media as their least trusted source.
 - Republicans (25%) and Independents (25%) are most likely to list social media as their most trusted source, compared to Democrats (19%).
 - Yet when it comes to distrust, Democrats (53%) and Independents (49%) are far more likely than Republicans (40%) to name social media as their least trusted source.

Virginia

- Virginians are deeply concerned about misinformation shaping this year's elections. Nearly all (93%) adults express concern that misinformation will mislead voters and influence election outcomes.
 - Democrats: 94% are concerned, 6% are not concerned
 - Republicans: 94% are concerned, 6% are not concerned
 - Independents: 88% are concerned, 12% are not concerned
- Concern is consistently high among Gen X (95%), Boomers (93%) and Millennials (92%), while Gen Z (91%) shows slightly lower concern.
- Misinformation is on the rise, with two-thirds (67%) of Virginians believing misinformation has increased in the past year, and more than half of respondents encountering it daily.
 - Concern around AI-driven misinformation is high, with three-quarters (74%) of adults worried that AI-generated misinformation will impact this election.
 - More than half (55%) believe AI will make it harder to identify misinformation.
 - Despite the widespread concern, only 12% feel extremely confident in their ability to spot misinformation.
 - When asked who should take responsibility for addressing misinformation, 38% believe the government is most responsible, 22% point to journalists, and 21% say individuals.
- Virginians surveyed cite social media and influencers (45%) as the most concerning sources of misinformation, followed by political candidates (31%) and their supporters (19%). Only 6% believe foreign governments are primarily responsible, underscoring that misinformation is largely viewed as a domestic issue.
 - Generational and partisan divides are clear. Younger voters rely on social media despite recognizing its risks, while older Virginians largely reject it as credible:
 - Gen Z and Millennials are the most likely to list social media as their most trusted source of news, driving the state's 20% overall trust rate for social platforms.
 - Boomers and Gen X, by contrast, overwhelmingly name social media as their least trusted source of news, contributing to the 50% statewide distrust rate.
 - The partisan split mirrors national trends: Republicans (22%) and Independents (24%) are slightly more likely than Democrats (18%) to list social media as their most trusted source.
 - Yet, Democrats (54%) are the most likely to rank social media as their least trusted source, followed closely by Independents (52%) and Republicans (47%).

Methodology

- This survey aimed to gather public opinions on misinformation and news consumption across the United States and in select states. SmartNews surveyed adults 18+ in a national sample of 1,082 and additional localized samples of 881 for California, 904 for New Jersey, 871 for Virginia, and 859 for New York City residents. The surveys were conducted from September 15 to September 19, 2025. The margin of error for the national sample is +/- 3 percentage points and for the state/city samples, the margin of error is +/- 5 percentage points.