
SURROUND SOUND

Congressional and federal agency staff are drowning in news, data and persuasive arguments. Who do they believe?



MILLIONS OF citizens and thousands of organizations contact Congress each year to urge Senators and House members to vote for or against legislation. Countless others weigh in with federal agencies on regulatory issues ranging from healthcare to livestock grazing rights.

Congressional and federal agency personnel are inundated with input. So how do staff know what to believe?

Who do they trust? And which methods of communicating with government seem to be most effective?

To find out, the Public Affairs Council teamed up with Morning Consult in an online survey of 173 congressional and federal employees. Participants were asked for their views on social media, fake news, influential methods of communication and trusted sources of policy information.

CONGRESSIONAL STAFFERS HAVE LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL MEDIA.

It's clear that most congressional and federal agency staff are active users of social media and believe it is effective for communicating with constituents and other stakeholders. Roughly half spend at least 30 minutes every day on either Facebook or Twitter, or both. Congressional staff are particularly heavy users with 68% spending at least 30 minutes on Twitter, 67% spending at least 30 minutes on Facebook, and 57% spending at least 30 minutes on Instagram.

Ninety percent (90%) of congressional staff call Twitter an effective channel for engaging constituents; 85% and 76% think Facebook and Instagram are effective, respectively. And, increasingly, their bosses have become true believers as well. Nearly two-thirds of congressional respondents say the members of Congress they work for personally use Twitter and/or Facebook.

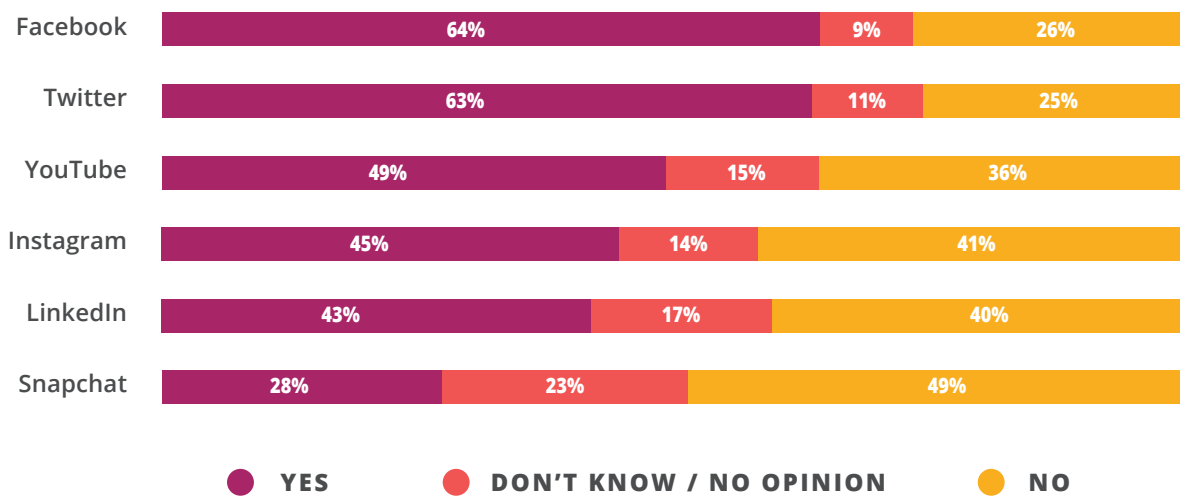
Executive branch employees don't spend as much time on social media as their congressional counterparts and their assessments are more muted. Among agency staff, the best platforms for engaging key stakeholders are Twitter (56%), Facebook (54%) and YouTube (54%).

69% of congressional staff say that people sharing fake news online is a major problem.

While social media is certainly appreciated in the halls of Congress, 69% of congressional staff say that people sharing fake news online is a major problem. Democratic staff, in particular, feel strongly about this issue, with 81% calling it a major problem. And yet, Republican staff are more likely than Democratic staff to say social media is harmful to political discourse in America.

A majority of congressional staffers report that the congressional member they work for personally use Twitter and Facebook.

Does the member of Congress or Senator you work for personally use the following social media?



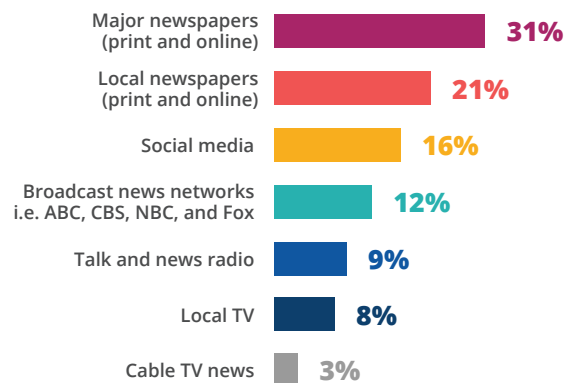
CAPITOL HILL DOESN'T BELIEVE NATIONAL MEDIA ARE "ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE."

Like some of the politicians they cover on a daily basis, major media outlets have taken a beating in the polls recently. Plus, they've earned the personal enmity of President Trump, who has repeatedly called media the "enemy of the people." Yet traditional media outlets

and especially major newspapers score extremely well among congressional staff and executive branch personnel as both trustworthy and beneficial sources of information.

Of the tested media sources, a plurality (35%) say social media is the most harmful news source to political discourse.

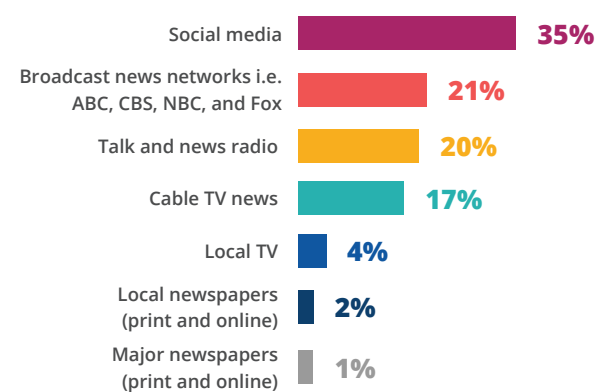
Of the following, which is the most **beneficial** to political discourse in the U.S.?



Seventy-five percent (75%) say major newspapers are somewhat or very beneficial to political discourse and only 9% say they are somewhat or very harmful to discourse. Local newspapers and local TV are second and third on the list with positive scores of 77% and 72% and negative scores of only 3% and 4%, respectively. Even broadcast news outlets such as ABC, CBS, NBC and FOX score well, with 66% saying they are beneficial and only 20% saying they are harmful.

Bringing up the rear are talk/news radio (56% beneficial, 27% harmful), cable news (53% beneficial, 32% harmful), and social media (46% beneficial, 38% harmful).

Of the following, which is the most **harmful** to political discourse in the U.S.?



Nearly one in three respondents (31%) believes major newspapers, both print and online, are the media source most beneficial to political discourse. That is easily the best score among various media options. Overall, social media is considered the most harmful to political discourse at 35%.

Congressional staff have a more positive opinion of social media than do federal agency staff. In fact, people working for Congress rate social media and major newspapers at about the same level. Perhaps because of age differences, federal agency staff are much more likely to think that major newspapers (36%) rather than social media (7%) are the most beneficial to political discourse.

WANT TO INFLUENCE CONGRESS? SHOW UP IN PERSON.

When asked to compare the effectiveness of different advocacy techniques, congressional staff rate personal visits to Washington, D.C., (83%) or district offices (81%), and think tank reports (81%) at the top of the list. Grassroots advocacy techniques such as emails, phone calls and postal mail campaigns also score above 75% for effectiveness.

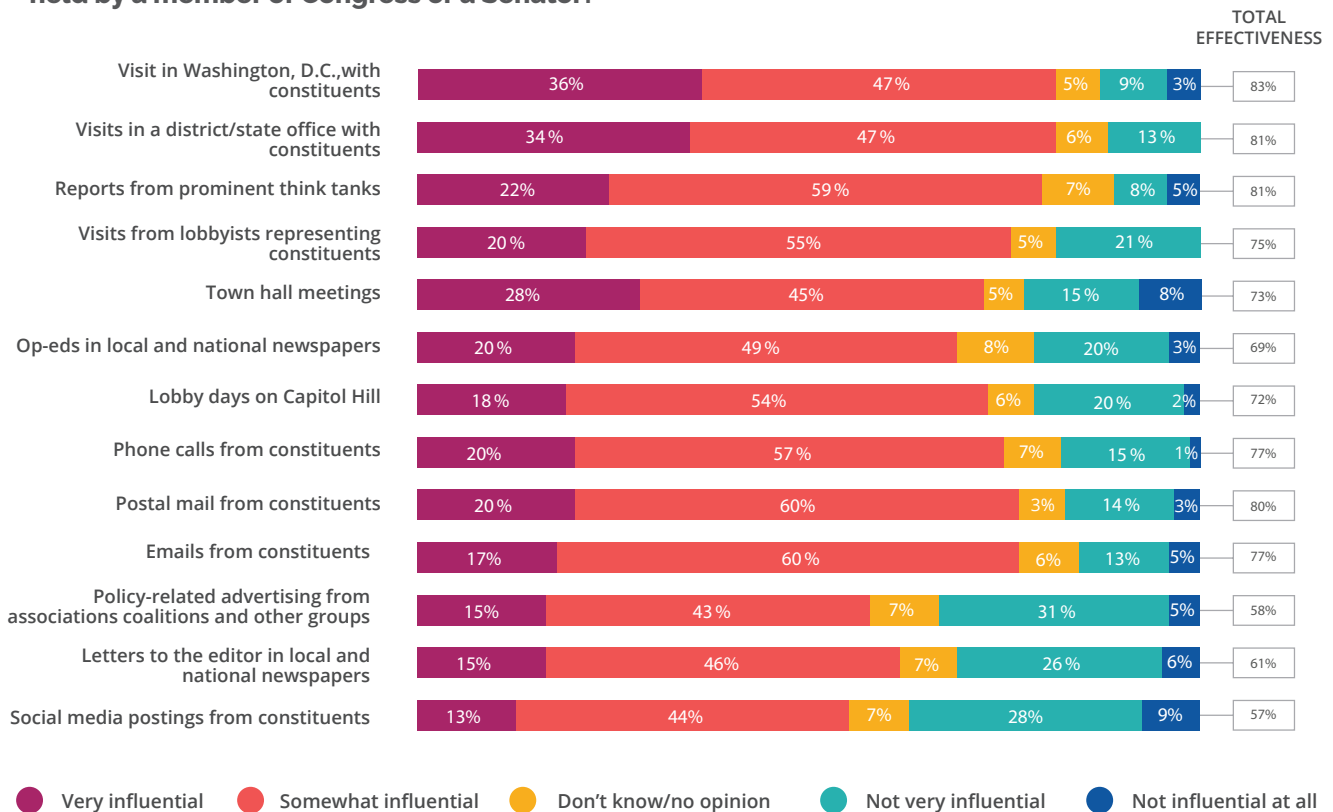
Traditional in-person visits from lobbyists are considered effective by a strong majority (75%), as are town halls (73%) and lobby days (72%). Of the 13 options considered, the lowest score goes to social

media posts, which are still rated effective by 57% of survey participants.

Despite their unpopularity with the general public, corporate CEOs are an asset when it comes to getting meetings scheduled with members of Congress. Eighty-three percent (83%) of congressional staffers say their boss would likely meet with a CEO from their district or state when that executive comes to Washington, D.C., compared with only 7% who say their boss would be unlikely to take the meeting.

According to congressional staffers, visits with constituents have the most influence on the legislative position held by a congressional member.

How influential are the following types of communication on the legislative position held by a member of Congress or a Senator?



WHO DOES THE GOVERNMENT TRUST FOR POLICY INFORMATION? THE GOVERNMENT.

Congressional staff and executive branch employees have a wide array of sources of policy information available to them. Which ones pass the credibility test?

The two highest-rated sources are the Congressional Research Service and the General Accountability Office, which earn scores for trust of 88% and 90%, respectively. In third place are federal agencies, which receive a similarly impressive trust score (86% rate them as trustworthy).

Eight out of 10 congressional and federal staffers say trade associations are trusted sources of political information



But major private-sector sources of information also score well. Eight out of 10 congressional and federal staffers say trade associations are trusted sources of political information and 79% feel that way about think tanks. Trust in major companies by federal staff is not quite as strong at 59%, but 79% of congressional staffers have some or a lot of trust in information from corporations. Sixty-one percent of the total sample say they trust lobbyists and only 55% say they trust online sources not affiliated with the news media.

Seventy-nine percent (79%) of congressional and federal staffers say think tanks are trusted sources of political information



POLICY-RELATED SOCIAL MEDIA ADS REACHING MORE THAN HALF OF CONGRESSIONAL STAFF.

The majority of congressional staff who see policy-related advertising on social media actually take the time to read the ads. Fifty-eight percent (58%) report seeing policy ads multiple times a week, and 55% say they read ads somewhat or very often. In contrast, only 43% of federal employees see policy ads multiple times weekly, and 46% read them somewhat or very often.

While advertising on social media is not considered among the most effective means of affecting public policy, it's worth noting that 58% of congressional staff surveyed believe policy advertising in general is influential.

METHODOLOGY

This poll was conducted between March 1 – March 20, 2019 among a national sample of 266 Adults, including 87 congressional staffers and 86 federal employees. The interviews were conducted online. This report references data collected from the 173 responses from congressional and federal employees. Results from the referenced data of the survey have a margin of error of plus or minus 7 percentage points.