

FOR RELEASE MARCH 17, 2013

Americans Show Signs of Leaving a News Outlet, Citing Less Information

BY *Jodi Enda and Amy Mitchell*

FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:

Amy Mitchell, Director, Journalism Research

202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Pew Research Center, March, 2013, "Americans Show Signs of Leaving a News Outlet, Citing Less Information"

About Pew Research Center

Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. It does not take policy positions. The center conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven social science research. It studies U.S. politics and policy; journalism and media; Internet, science and technology; religion and public life; Hispanic trends; global attitudes and trends; and U.S. social and demographic trends. All of the center's reports are available at www.pewresearch.org. Pew Research Center is a subsidiary of The Pew Charitable Trusts, its primary funder.

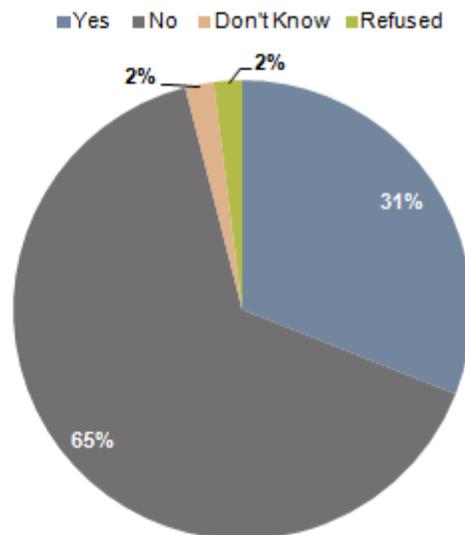
© Pew Research Center 2013

Faced with shrinking revenue and dwindling audiences, news organizations in recent years have slashed staffs and reduced coverage. Most news consumers are little aware of the financial struggles that led to these cuts, a new Pew Research Center survey finds. Nevertheless, a significant percentage of them not only have noticed a difference in the quantity or quality of news, but have stopped reading, watching or listening to a news source because of it.

Nearly one-third—31%—of people say they have deserted a particular news outlet because it no longer provides the news and information they had grown accustomed to, according to the survey of more than 2,000 U.S. adults in early 2013. And those most likely to have walked away are better educated, wealthier and older than those who did not—in other words, they are people who tend to be most prone to consume and pay for news.

Some Americans Are Abandoning News Outlets That No Longer Serve Their Needs

Percentage of U.S. Adults



N=2009

Survey Question: Have you stopped turning to a particular news outlet because you felt they were no longer providing you with the news and information you were accustomed to getting?

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

2013 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

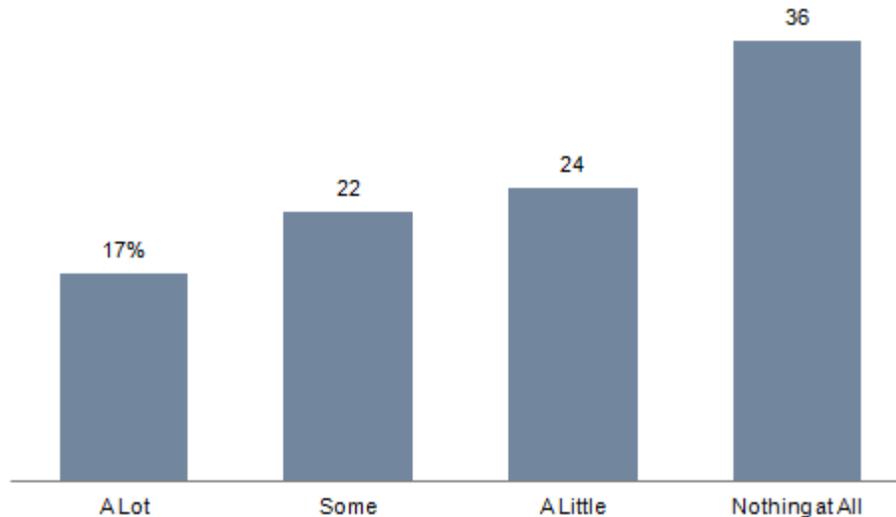
The findings represent one more piece of bad news for organizations already laboring to secure their place in the 21st century.

Despite the audience recoil, the majority of people surveyed early this year had heard little or nothing about the financial problems besetting news organizations. The largest group of respondents—36%—said they heard “nothing at all” about the issue and the second largest—24%—

said they heard “a little.” That combined total of 60% far overshadows the 39% of people who said they heard “a lot” (17%) or “some” (22%) about the financial woes of the news industry.

Few Americans Are Very Aware of News Industry's Financial Problems

Percentage of U.S. Adults



N=2009

Note: Less than 1% responded don't know or refused to answer the question.

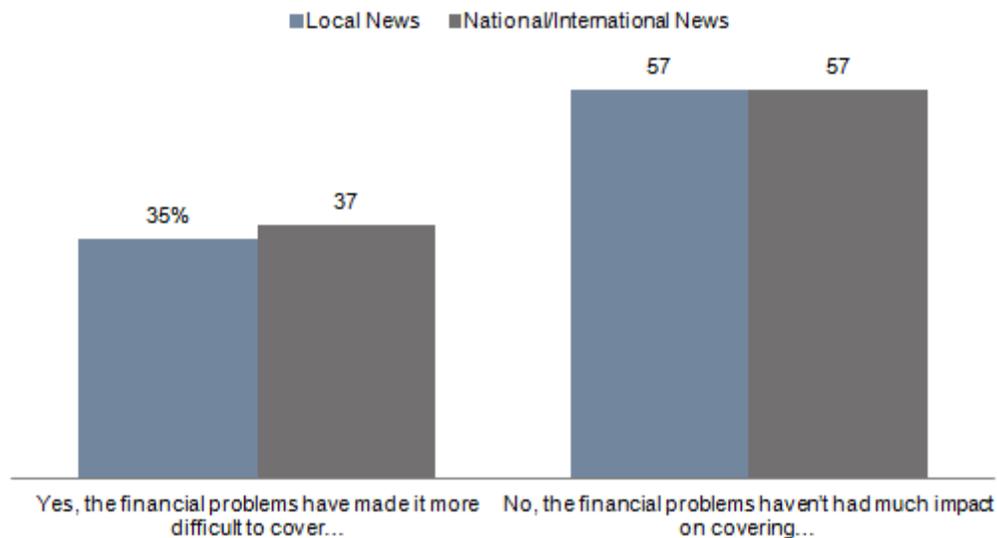
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

2013 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

While a majority of people don't sense a connection between the news media's financial strains and quality reporting, a significant minority do detect a direct connection between the two. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents who had heard at least a little about the financial struggles said they didn't think the situation had much of an impact on the media's ability to cover local, national or international news. At the same time, about one-third—35%—said the problems have made it more difficult to cover local news, while a similar 37% said they have made it harder to cover national and international news.

More than a Third Link Finances to Reporting Power

Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Have Heard at Least a Little About the News Industry's Financial Struggles



N=1,345

Note: Those who did not to respond or answered don't know are not included here.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

2013 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

Perhaps more ominous for news outlets, those who are more aware of the financial problems and those who see a connection to reporting are the people most likely to have abandoned an outlet because it no longer provided them with the news and information they relied on.

In other words, people most acutely familiar with the economic struggles are the most likely to lose their patience with a news outlet: 43% of the people who said they heard a lot about the financial troubles stopped turning to a news outlet because they were dissatisfied with what they were getting. That was true of just 20% of those who heard nothing about the problems. Likewise, 45% of the people who said the financial problems made it more difficult for news outlets to cover local, national or foreign news abandoned an outlet, compared to about one-third of those who did not see much of an impact.

Those Who Heard More About the Financial Problems Are More Likely to Have Left a News Outlet

Percentage of U.S. Adults

Among Those Who Heard...	Left a News Outlet	Did Not Leave a News Outlet
A Lot	43%	55%
Some	38	60
A Little	33	62
Nothing At All	20	77

N=2,009

Note: Those who did not respond or answered don't know are not included here.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

2013 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

People who said they had forsaken a news outlet were more likely to be men than women, older than younger, richer than poorer and Republican or independent rather than Democratic. While about one-third of Republicans and independents stopped turning to a news outlet, just one-quarter of Democrats did.

Men, Older Generations, Republicans and Independents Are More Likely to Have Left a News Outlet

Percentage of U.S. Adults

	Percentage
Age	
18-29 years	27%
30-49 years	29
50-64 years	33
65+	36
Gender	
Female	28
Male	34
Party Identification	
Republican	33
Democrat	26
Independent	34

N=2,009

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

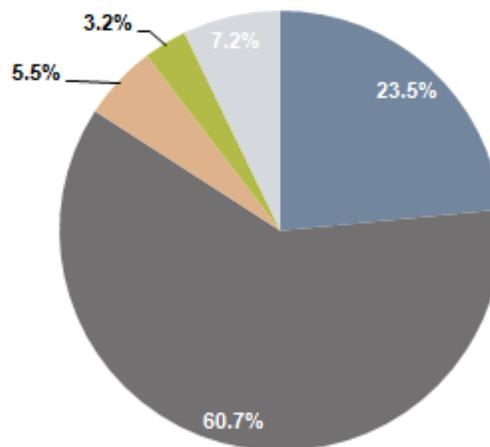
2013 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

What's more, the primary concern for people who gave up on an outlet seems to be quality. When asked which they noticed more, fewer stories or less complete stories, far more people said the latter (24% to 61%). While reduced thoroughness in stories was the more prevalent response among adults overall who were aware of the struggles, the split was not nearly as wide – 48% versus 31%.

Quality Far Outweighs Quantity, Among Those Who Walked Away

Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Said They Have Stopped Turning to a News Outlet

■ There are fewer stories ■ The stories are less complete ■ Both/Equal Effect
■ Neither ■ Don't Know/Refused/Other



N= 401

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

2013 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

Most Adults Have Heard Little About the Financial Problems

Still, the majority of those who have heard something about the financial strains don't think they harm news coverage—a somewhat striking finding given the tens of thousands of layoffs and buyouts that have occurred in newsrooms throughout the country the past several years.

The newspaper industry alone shed 28% of its employees since its peak in 2001, according to The American Society of News Editors' annual newsroom census, and in 2012, that number is estimated to have dipped below 40,000 employees for the first time since the census began in 1978.

From 1998 through 2010, eighteen newspapers and two newspaper chains closed all of their foreign bureaus, according to a tally by American Journalism Review. Other outlets reduced the number of correspondents in their bureaus.

In Washington, news organizations have drastically reduced their coverage of the federal government and some of its most visible departments, such as State, Defense, Justice and Treasury, AJR reported. For instance, in 2003, 23 reporters covered the Pentagon. Seven years later, 10 did. During the same period of time, reporters covering the State Department dropped from 15 to nine. Financial pressures also have led to a sharp reduction in the number of reporters who travel with the president in the United States and abroad.

Who is Aware of the Turmoil and Sees and Impact

In the Pew Research poll, certain categories of people were more aware than others of news outlets' financial problems. People 65 and older, college graduates, those who earned more than \$75,000 a year and residents of the Northeast were more likely to have heard something about the

Demographics: Those Who Have Heard a Lot or Some About the Financial Problems of News Organizations

Percentage of U.S. Adults

	Percentage
Age	
18-29 years	35%
30-49 years	38
50-64 years	41
65+	46
Education	
College Education	54
Some College Education	37
≤ High School Education	32
Income	
< \$30,000	32
\$30-49,900	34
\$50-74,900	42
\$75,000 or more	50
Geography	
Northeast Region	47
Midwest Region	33
South	40
West	40
Total	39

N=868

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

2013 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

situation than people who were younger or less educated, those who earned less money or those who lived in other parts of the country, particularly the Midwest.

Nearly half—46%—of people 65 and older said they had heard “a lot” or “some” about the financial problems, compared to 35% of 18- to 29-year-olds and 38% of 30- to 49-year-olds. In fact, a full 42% of 30- to 49-year-olds said they had heard “nothing at all” about the issue.

Half the people with annual incomes of more than \$75,000 said they had heard “a lot” or “some” about the media’s financial woes. That figure declined as income did, with slightly less than one third of people who earned less than \$30,000 asserting at least some knowledge of the problems. Nearly half—47%—of residents of the Northeast, the most media-saturated part of the country, said they had heard “a lot” or “some” about the situation, compared to 40% of people in the South or West and just 33% of those in the Midwest.

Those who were older and more educated were also more likely to tie the financial struggles to greater difficulty reporting local news. College graduates who had heard at least a little about the financial difficulties were most likely to say they hurt local coverage, at a rate of 43%, compared to 32% of people with some college education and 31% who did not attend college at all. Among the

Demographics: Those Who Believe Financial Struggles Make It Harder to Cover Local News

Percentage of U.S. Adults

	Percentage
Age	
18-29 years	32%
30-49 years	31
50-64 years	40
65+	38
Education	
College Education	43
Some College Education	32
≤ High School Education	31
Income	
< \$30,000	30
\$30-49,900	38
\$50-74,900	36
\$75,000 or more	36
Geography	
Northeast Region	39
Midwest Region	33
South	33
West	36

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

2013 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

various age groups, 40% of respondents aged 50 to 64 who heard at least a little about the financial constraints felt they made it more difficult to cover local news, as did 38% of people 65 and above. But less than a third of people under 50 answered that way.

When it came to national and international news coverage, demographic differences were less pronounced. The most conspicuous gap was a partisan one: 39% of Democrats who had heard at least a little about the financial situation said it made reporting harder, compared to 31% of Republicans. African Americans were most likely to say money did not have much of an impact on coverage, at 67%, compared with 56% of whites.

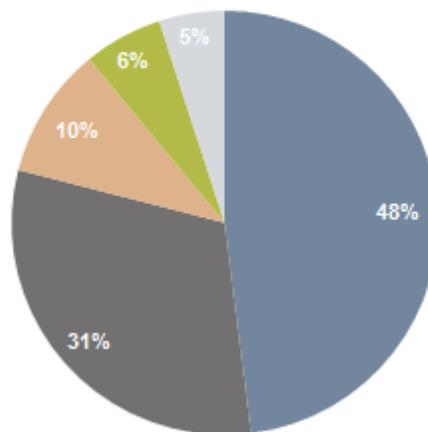
Quality versus Quantity

To gauge the public's view of how the financial travails have affected news coverage, the survey asked people whether they thought news stories were less complete than they used to be or whether there simply were fewer of them. This goes to the issue of content, and pits quality against quantity. About half—48%—of respondents said stories are not as thorough as they were before, while slightly less than a third—31%—said stories are fewer.

Quality of Coverage Seen as a Bigger Impact than Quantity

Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Have Heard at Least a Little About the News Industry's Financial Struggles

■ The stories Are Less Complete ■ There Are Fewer Stories ■ Don't Know/Refused/Other
 ■ Neither ■ Both/Equal Effect



N=1,345

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

2013 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

The sense that thoroughness was a bigger problem than the quantity of stories carries across all demographics, though it was more pronounced among Republicans, independents and Southerners and less so among Democrats and Midwesterners. This comports, in part, with political divisions in the country. Men tend to vote in greater percentages for Republicans and women for Democrats.¹ The South is dominated by Republicans; the Midwest is divided.

Who Cites Quality vs. Quantity as a Bigger Effect on News Coverage

Percentage of U.S. Adults Who Have Heard at Least a Little About the News Industry's Financial Struggles

	Stories Are Less Complete	There Are Fewer Stories
Gender		
Female	44%	33%
Male	52	29
Party Identification		
Republican	52	26
Democrat	42	36
Independent	52	29
Geography		
Northeast Region	44	31
Midwest Region	44	36
South	53	27
West	47	31

N= 1,039

Note: Those who refused to respond or answered don't know, are not included here.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

2013 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

What stands out even more is the degree to which people who left a news outlet they were dissatisfied with blamed a reduction in the quality of reporting. Fully 61% of them said stories were less complete than they had been versus just 24% who complained there were too few stories. For those who have not abandoned a news outlet, the breakdown is much more even.

So what do these findings mean for news organizations? It is clear from these data that much of the country recognizes little if anything about the economic challenges the industry is grappling with—and that much of the knowledge and concern about the economics and the future of the news business may be largely confined to the industry itself. But the news consumers who are more aware of the problems and their impact on news are more likely to act on those concerns by abandoning a news organization. And, based on demographics, they also are likely to be more

¹ ["The Gender Gap: Three Decades Old, as Wide as Ever."](#) Pew Research Center. March, 29, 2012.

ardent news consumers who are willing to invest in a product they value.² They appear to be making informed choices. The job of news organizations is to come to terms with the fact that, as they search for economic stability, their financial future may well hinge on their ability to provide high quality reporting.

Methodology

The PSRAI January Week 4 and February Week 1 2013 Omnibus Polls obtained telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 2,009 adults living in the continental United States. Telephone interviews were conducted by landline (1,003) and cell phone (1,006, including 512 without a landline phone). The surveys were conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI). Interviews were done in English by Princeton Data Source from January 24 to 27 and February 7 to 10, 2013. Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 2.5 percentage points.

² ["The Demographics of Mobile News."](#) Pew Research Center. Dec. 11, 2012.

Pew Research Center
Citing Reduced Quality, Many Americans Abandon News Outlets

January-February 2013
 N=2,009 adults

ASK ALL:

Q.1 How much, if anything, have you heard about the financial problems facing news organizations such as newspapers, magazines and television news? Have you heard a lot, some, a little or nothing at all?

A Lot	17%
Some	22
A Little	24
Nothing at all	36
Don't know	*
Refused	*
NET a lot/some	39
NET a lot/some/a little	63
NET a little/nothing at all	60

ASK IF Q1 = 1 OR 2 OR 3**BASED ON HEARD A LOT, SOME OR A LITTLE ABOUT THE FINANCIAL PROBLEMS [N=1,345]:**

Q.2 Do you think the financial problems of news organizations have made it more difficult for them to do a good job covering LOCAL news than in the past... or hasn't it had much impact?

Yes, it has made it more difficult	35%
No, hasn't had much impact	57
Don't know	6
Refused	1

ASK IF Q2 = 1**BASED ON HAS MADE IT DIFFICULT TO DO A GOOD JOB COVERING LOCAL NEWS [N=495]**

Q2a. How much more difficult do you think it has made it for news organizations to do a good job of covering LOCAL news? [READ 1-3]

A lot more difficult	29%
Somewhat more difficult	49
Just a little more difficult	20
Don't know	1
Refused	1

ASK IF Q1 = 1 OR 2 OR 3**BASED ON HEARD A LOT, SOME OR A LITTLE ABOUT THE FINANCIAL PROBLEMS [N=1,345]:**

Q3. Do you think the financial problems of news organizations have made it more difficult for them to do a good job covering NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL news than in the past... or hasn't it had much impact?

Yes, it has made it more difficult	37%
No, hasn't had much impact	57
Don't know	6
Refused	1

ASK IF Q3 = 1**BASED ON HAS MADE IT DIFFICULT TO DO A GOOD JOB COVERING NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS [N=505]**

Q3a. How much more difficult do you think it has made it for news organizations to do a good job of covering NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL news? [READ 1-3]

A lot more difficult	37%
Somewhat more difficult	47
Just a little more difficult	14
Don't know	1
Refused	*

ASK IF Q1 = 1 OR 2 OR 3**BASED ON HEARD A LOT, SOME OR A LITTLE ABOUT THE FINANCIAL PROBLEMS [N=1,345]:**

Q4. Which effect on the news coverage have you noticed more? That...[READ AND RANDOMIZE: (there are fewer stories) or that (the stories are less complete)]?

There are fewer stories	31%
The stories are less complete	48
Both/Equal effect (VOL.)	5
Neither (VOL.)	6
Other (VOL.)	1
Don't know	7
Refused	2

ASK ALL:

Q5. Have you stopped turning to a particular news outlet because you felt they were no longer providing you with the news and information you were accustomed to getting?

Yes	31%
No	65
Don't know	2
Refused	2