



More in Common welcomes the opportunity to participate in the review of codes of practice for the media industry. We have included relevant data, both quantitative and qualitative, from our research into polarisation and division in Britain and hope this contributes to this important discussion.

We began our work in 2017, inspired by the words of Jo Cox MP, whose maiden speech outlined the ethos that ‘we have more in common than what divides us’. More in Common works on research and initiatives to address the underlying drivers of fracturing and polarisation, and build more united, resilient, and inclusive societies. Our work starts with building a strong evidence base through our research. Our social psychology lens helps us to deeper understand populations, and as a person’s fundamental belief systems is unlikely to change throughout their lifetime it offers a useful perspective to understand what is important to these groups, as well as to ascertain which groups are most vulnerable to polarising and divisive narratives.

In October in the UK, we published ‘Britain’s Choice: Common Ground and Division in 2020s Britain’, the culmination of 18 months of research, interviews, focus groups, and polling. We set out to better understand what divides as well as what unites us. Our conclusion is that Britain is not divided into two opposing camps, rather we find seven distinct groups, who are distinguished not by who they are, where they are from, or what they look like, but what they believe. It is useful to use this segmentation to analyse media consumption, trust in the news media, social media usage, and our data is included here with the segmentation applied in most cases, as well as explanations of the key characteristics of the seven segments we find in the population (Fig. 1).

Media consumption behaviour is strongly linked to the core beliefs and psychology of individuals, and thus there are common patterns of readership or viewership among the segments. Across the entire British population, the BBC is the source of information that is used by the largest number of people. However, there are also important differences in the other sources of information people use (Fig 2).

We also highlight the role of the media in exacerbating societal divisions and reproducing harmful narratives. In Britain’s Choice we found 74 per cent think that the media often makes the country feel more divided than it really is (Fig 3).

It is important to note there that although we endeavoured to include Northern Ireland in our assessment, our initial polling data was not sufficiently reliable to place further polling in the field there. We do note from partners working in Northern Ireland how the media landscape is quite different to that in Great Britain.

We present 6 key areas where we believe our work could be of benefit to an analysis of media consumption, information ecospheres, and trust in institutions, which includes legacy and new forms of news media.

**Often we see controversies arise in the media as part of so called ‘culture wars’ and the ‘othering’ of specific groups in the community.**

Using social psychology, and in particular the moral foundations framework in our research, means we can assess in some ways the impact a news event, on a topic such as immigration, might have on different sections of the population.

For a person who relies more on the authority foundation, events or news related to immigration tend to act as a trigger to that foundation, thus activating this person’s sense of respect for authority and the perception that it might be under threat. Authoritarianism relates to the cognitive need for oneness and sameness, also tied to the likelihood that an individual struggles to cope with change. Those with stronger authoritarian tendencies, who in the UK belong to the Loyal Nationals, Disengaged Traditionalists, and Backbone Conservatives segments, are more inclined to view immigration negatively, as they likely connect (even if subconsciously) immigration to a threat to the in-group.

Progressive Activists are motivated by the moral foundations of fairness and care, and they can take a view that the media has portrayed certain groups within society in a negative way.

*‘It makes me so cross the way that immigrants have been treated in this country. They’ve come here to help us. They’re not scroungers like what they keep saying but that’s what the tabloid press wants to churn out, to scapegoat. It’s infuriating.’ Maria, Progressive Activist, 25, East of England. (Britain’s Choice, 2020)*

*‘When you have that sort of, what I consider to be a lethal cocktail of the media and society demonising a particular group because of actions that are happening elsewhere around the world. And just ascribing that to individuals that live in the UK. That can make – even though you may feel like a belongingness, and it’s the only thing that you know, living in London, born in London, went to school in London – it can make you feel threatened. It can also make you feel alienated within the only country you know. You can’t go back home. You can’t go anywhere else. Because you don’t even know anything about it. You don’t even have a home there. You don’t even know anyone over there. But the people that you considered to be your sort of fellow citizens are the ones that are sort of demonising you and making you feel unwelcomed in your own country, that you consider to be your own country.’ Omar, Progressive Activist, 35, London (Britain’s Choice 2020)*

However, our research also finds that the false binaries of the ‘culture wars’ do not actually resonate with the reality of attitudes of most people. For example, 73 per cent of Britons are worried about hate speech, and at the same time 72 per cent believe that political correctness is a problem (Fig 4). We also find that three in five British people say they feel exhausted by the division they see in politics, which is then represented in the media. The public appetite for a more unifying narrative in politics and media is often underestimated.

**One of the drivers of these ‘culture war’ conflicts are the dynamics of social media, that tend to polarise and reward the most inflammatory content, however we also see this in legacy media.**

Politicians and media influencers face constant temptations to ignite conflicts, and the tribal outrage machine of social media ensures engagement around them no matter how trivial the issues. Over time, such conflicts can spawn extremism on opposing sides, while alienating and frustrating the rest of the population, which finds such conflict exhausting and irrelevant to their lives.

We also highlight who uses social media the most, and why this could give a more uneven analysis of public attitudes (Fig 5). Progressive Activists have strong views and take stances that sometimes put them at odds with the rest of society. They are culturally influential and are six times more likely to post about politics on Twitter and other social media platforms than any other group.

However, in our qualitative research we also found agreement between segments on the role of the mainstream media in exacerbating division.

*'Division is how media companies make their money, how corporations make their money. I think it's intentional. The government maybe finds it easier to keep control if we're all arguing against each other.'* Nick, Progressive Activist, 34, London (Britain's Choice, 2020)

*'We are divided. I mean, there's major culprits like the mainstream media. They're the ones keeping us divided.'* George, Loyal National, 62, West Midlands (Britain's Choice, 2020)

*'The press and the media will immediately go back in making a big song and dance about Brexit, whether you're for or against it. You don't know what false news is and what's real. At the moment, I don't trust the media for what they're reporting.'* Freddie, Disengaged Traditionalist, 67, South West (Britain's Choice, 2020)

From our work in the United States it is clear what lies ahead if the so-called 'culture war' debates are exported from the United States to the United Kingdom and other countries. Politicians, opinion-makers, and social media activists can be quick to pick up on symbolic issues that inflame the differences between groups in society, create false choices between opposing extremes, and then polarise groups around those false binaries. Mainstream and new media organisations need to take care not to follow the route taken in the US, where entire sections of the population access their news from different sources, with very different narratives, who cater only for their primary audience.

**Even though a majority want regulations brought in for social media, a key challenge in any press regulation is to avoid feeding these 'culture wars' or cultures of victimisation.**

There is a consensus around the need for the government to better regulate social media companies, with 76 per cent in agreement. The strongest agreement is seen among Loyal Nationals (85 per cent), Civic Pragmatists (82 per cent), and Backbone Conservatives (81 per cent) (Fig 6).

When it comes to regulating established news media outlets there is a concern that a heavy-handed approach would exacerbate tensions, and further erode trust in those within the population who do not believe the media represents their views anyway. Any kind of censorship risks exacerbating the sentiment that the media is unrepresentative, something we see already within certain segments. In our most recent polling, 53% said the news does not reflect the views of people like them, with Loyal Nationals feeling this most strongly (63%) while Established Liberals were most likely to say it does (27% compared to an average of 21%) (Fig 7). There is also a concern that journalism has become too political, suggesting that any regulation must be approached in an independent, non-partisan way, or existing distrust and divisions will be exacerbated (Fig 8).

That said, the damaging impact of social media on traditional news media also suggests there needs to be a holistic approach to information ecosystems, incorporating regulation on what is published on social media, as well as what features in the written and broadcast media. We see the effect of social media diminishing trust among all segments of the population (fig 9).

**There are distinctive media consumption and trust dimensions to the seven segments, and this might be helpful in addition to traditional approaches of defining audiences by demographic characteristics and region.**

Media consumption of the different segments shows a pattern of greater engagement among those for whom politics is important (Fig 10). Consumption of a newspaper, either physical copy or online, stood at roughly 30% for both Disengaged Battlers and Disengaged Traditionalist, compared to an average of 41%, with similar findings for listening to radio news programmes, or watching news on TV.

From our findings in February 2020 in research we carried out for our Britain's Choice report, we found trust in journalists was low across all segments, but the lowest levels of trust were seen amongst Disengaged Battlers, Loyal Nationals, and Disengaged Traditionalists (Fig 11).

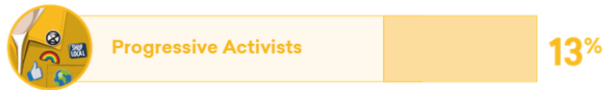
This lack of trust is also seen in the sources of information available to the population. When we asked about trust in information sources, we found overall a broad trust for television news channels, and broadsheet newspapers (the examples given were The Telegraph, Times, Financial Times, Guardian) and strong mistrust of the tabloid newspapers (examples were the Daily Mail, Express, Mirror, Sun) (Fig 12). Only 20% of those asked thought that information they learnt from a tabloid newspaper was trustworthy, while information in broadsheet newspapers and news broadcasters is trusted by 55% of those asked. This lack of trust is seen even amongst those who are likely readers of the tabloid newspapers. A further examination of each segments engagement with the news media will be invaluable to understanding how the British population interacts with the news media, alongside traditional approaches to defining audiences.

**A key insight from our work is that common ground efforts can play a key role in bridging differences.**

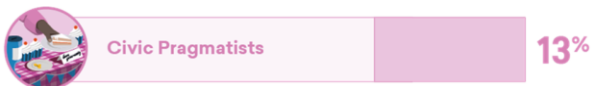
Like other western democracies, Britain has seen the forces of division grow stronger in recent years. A large majority feel that the country has become more divided, and half of the country believes those divisions have never been so bad. To varying degrees, there is evidence for those sentiments as we have grown less trusting and understanding of each other and of our institutions. In public debate it is so much easier now for minor squabbles to ignite major conflicts, fuelled by bellicose voices that have mastered the medium of viral social media platforms. Different experiences, values, and beliefs that drive political behaviour are easier to exploit in times of uncertainty and insecurity, and incendiary media commentators, extremist groups, foreign powers, and self-serving politicians have become increasingly active and effective in exploiting such differences. There is every reason to expect that the intensity of these forces will continue to grow in future years unless efforts are taken to find common ground and to bridge differences, alongside countering the 'othering' of groups in our society. We hope the media will play an important role in these efforts, rather than act as a divisive and polarising force in British society.

## Appendix

Figure 1 The seven segments of the British population



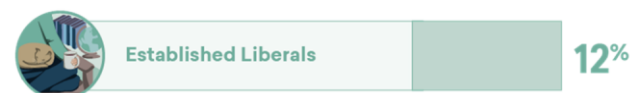
Progressive Activists are highly-educated, urban, and more likely than any other group to be in work. They think globally and are motivated to fight inequality and injustice. Their sense of personal identity is connected to their strong political and social beliefs. They are often supporters of Labour, the Greens and, in Scotland, the SNP. They like to take part in debates and have their voice heard. They are far more active in posting about politics on social media than any other group, and are big consumers of news from many sources, with The Guardian newspaper a big favourite.



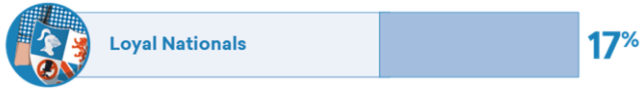
Civic Pragmatists are well-informed about issues and often have clear opinions, but their social and political beliefs are generally not central to their sense of personal identity. Women outnumber men in this segment by two to one. They stand out for the strength of their commitment to others. For example, almost all Civic Pragmatists regularly donate to charity, and they show strong support for civic values and community, consensus, and compromise. More than any other group, they feel exhausted by the division in politics. Like all seven segments, they use the BBC to get their news, although Civic Pragmatists are also more likely to watch Channel 5 than other groups.



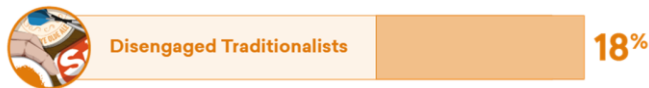
Disengaged Battlers are focused on the everyday struggle for survival. They have work, but often it is insecure or involves irregular hours. They tend to feel disconnected from other people, and many say they have given up on the system altogether. They are less connected to others in their local area as well and are the only group where a majority felt that they have been alone during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although life is tough for Disengaged Battlers, they blame the system, not other people, and are socially liberal. Disengaged Battlers mostly do not pay much attention to news, but if they do it is most likely to be through the BBC, The Daily Mirror, The Metro, or commercial radio news.



Educated, comfortable, and often quite wealthy, Established Liberals feel at ease in their own skin – as well as the country they live in. They tend to trust the government, institutions, and those around them. They are almost twice as likely than any other group to feel that their voices are represented in politics. They are also most likely to believe that people can change society if they work together. They think compromise is important, feel that diversity enriches society and think Britain should be more globally-oriented. More than any other group they choose to read The Times newspaper, but also listen to BBC Radio 4.



Loyal Nationals feel proud of their country and patriotic about its history and past achievements. They also feel anxious about threats to Britain, in the face of which they believe we need to come together and pursue our national self-interest. Loyal Nationals carry a deep strain of frustration at having their views and values excluded by decision-makers in London. They feel disrespected by educated elites, and feel more generally that others' interests are often put ahead of theirs. Loyal Nationals believe we live in a dog-eat-dog world, and that Britain is often naïve in its dealing with other countries. Loyal Nationals get their news from The Daily Mail, The Sun, and ITV. In common with the Progressive Activists, with whom they also share a strong focus on inequality, they also get a lot of information from Facebook and local newspapers.



Disengaged Traditionalists (18 per cent of the population): Disengaged Traditionalists value a feeling of self-reliance and take pride in a hard day's work. They believe in a well-ordered society and put a strong priority on issues of crime and justice. When they think about social and political debates, Disengaged Traditionalists often consider issues through a lens of suspicion towards others' behaviour and observance of Britain's social rules. While they do have viewpoints on issues, they tend to pay limited attention to public debates. They have views in common with the Loyal Nationals, but see society differently, mainly through the lens of individuals rather than groups.

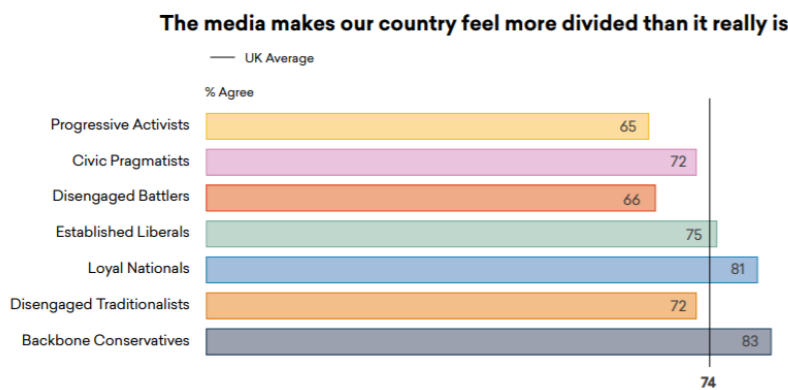


Backbone Conservatives are proud to be British and confident of their place in the world. They tend to be older and more prosperous than others, with many living in the South East. They are nostalgic about Britain's history, cultural heritage, and the monarchy, but looking to the future they are also the only group where a majority think that the country is going in the right direction. They are very interested in social and political issues, follow the news closely, and are stalwart supporters of the Conservative Party. Compared to most people, Backbone Conservatives are more negative on immigration, less concerned about racism, more supportive of public spending cuts and less convinced that there is a North/South divide. In addition to the BBC, their preferred sources of news are The Daily Mail, The Daily Telegraph, and The Daily Express.

Figure 2 News sources used regularly for the past month for news about government and politics (February 2020, More in Common)

News sources	Segment							All
	Progressive Activists	Civic Pragmatists	Disengaged Battlers	Established Liberals	Loyal Nationals	Disengaged Traditionalists	Backbone Conservatives	
Commercial radio news	3%	6%	4%	6%	7%	3%	6%	5%
BBC radio 4	24%	14%	5%	21%	7%	4%	11%	12%
BBC radio 5 live	5%	5%	3%	5%	5%	3%	5%	4%
LBC News	5%	4%	3%	4%	3%	3%	6%	4%
Facebook	23%	19%	13%	14%	21%	11%	14%	16%
Twitter	26%	11%	9%	11%	7%	7%	8%	11%
Other online news	18%	10%	5%	11%	10%	6%	9%	10%
BBC	70%	64%	40%	65%	56%	38%	61%	55%
ITV	15%	27%	16%	20%	34%	20%	30%	23%
Sky News	13%	17%	14%	15%	19%	14%	21%	16%
Channel 4	25%	13%	9%	13%	9%	5%	9%	11%
Channel 5	3%	5%	3%	4%	5%	3%	3%	4%
Metro	8%	8%	6%	7%	9%	4%	6%	7%
The Sun	2%	3%	4%	4%	10%	9%	7%	6%
Daily Mail	4%	12%	11%	14%	18%	13%	27%	14%
Daily Mirror	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%
The Times	11%	6%	4%	13%	4%	3%	8%	7%
The Daily Express	1%	2%	1%	4%	4%	4%	5%	3%
The Daily Telegraph	6%	5%	2%	10%	5%	5%	11%	6%
Financial Times	8%	1%	1%	5%	0%	1%	2%	2%
The Guardian	58%	17%	10%	15%	5%	3%	6%	15%
The i	12%	5%	1%	4%	2%	0%	2%	3%
The Huffington Post	13%	5%	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	4%
Buzzfeed	8%	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	3%
A regional or local newspaper	12%	11%	6%	9%	12%	5%	11%	9%
Podcasts	11%	2%	3%	5%	2%	1%	1%	3%
Other	7%	4%	3%	5%	3%	2%	4%	4%
None of the above	6%	8%	18%	6%	10%	13%	8%	10%
I don't have an interest in news	2%	6%	16%	7%	8%	19%	6%	9%

Figure 3 Role of the media in making the UK feel divided (February 2020, More in Common)



Qu. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about politics in the UK today? I think the media often makes our country feel more divided than it really is. February 2020.  
Source: More in Common 2020.

Figure 4 UK population are ‘balancers’ when discussing race and social justice (February 2020, More in Common)

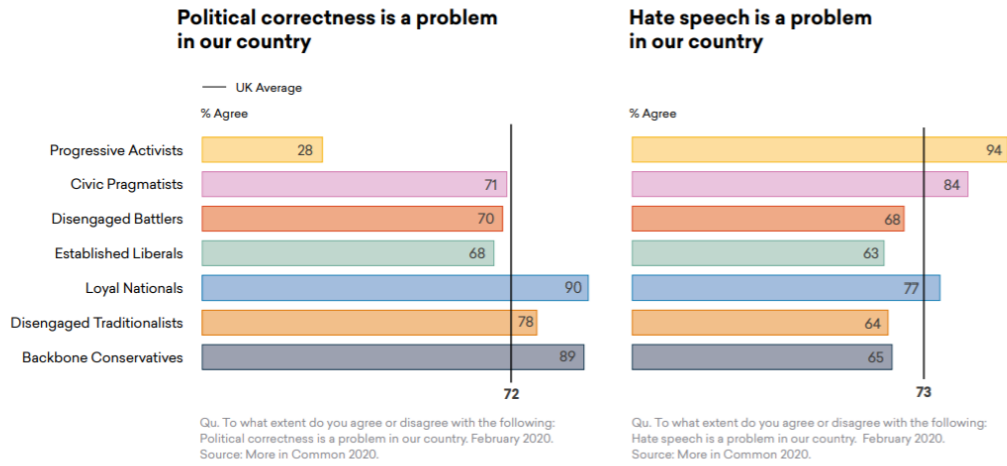


Figure 5 Sharing political content on social media (February 2020, More in Common)

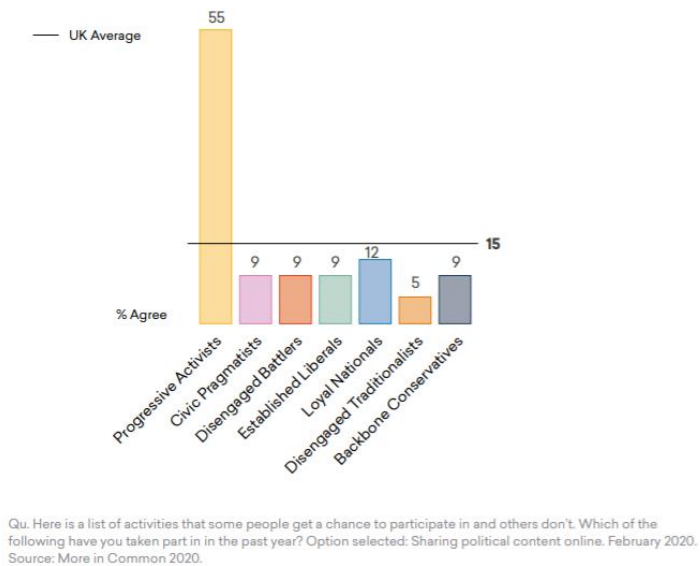






Figure 6 Governments need to better regulate social media companies (February 2020, More in Common)

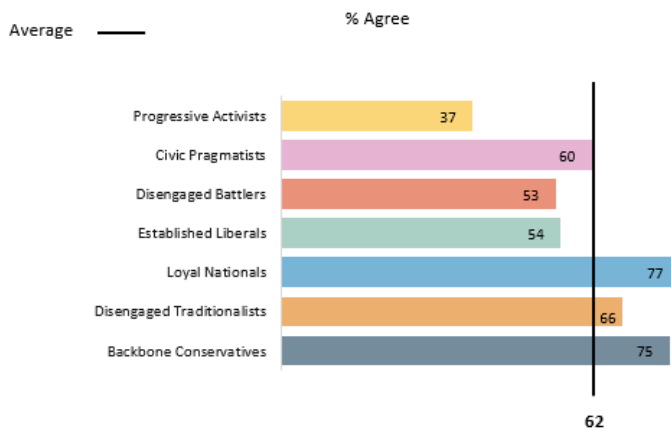
Segment									
Governments need to better regulate social media companies.	Progressive Activists	Civic Pragmatists	Disengaged Battlers	Established Liberals	Loyal Nationals	Disengaged Traditionalists	Backbone Conservatives	All	
	Somewhat agree, Strongly agree	80%	88%	82%	78%	92%	81%	86%	84%
Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree	20%	12%	18%	22%	8%	19%	14%	16%	

Figure 7 Does the news reflect a range of views (January 2020, More in Common/Engine MHP)

Segment									
In general, do you think the news does or does not reflect the views of people like you?	Progressive Activists	Civic Pragmatists	Disengaged Battlers	Established Liberals	Loyal Nationals	Disengaged Traditionalists	Backbone Conservatives	All	
	Does reflect the views of people like me	22%	25%	18%	27%	17%	18%	23%	21%
Does not reflect the views of people like me	51%	51%	48%	41%	63%	56%	55%	53%	
Don't know	27%	24%	34%	32%	20%	26%	22%	26%	

Figure 8 Journalism has become too political (January 2020, More in Common/Engine MHP)

Please state whether you think they have or have not become too political: Journalism



Source: More in Common + ENGINE MHP 2021

Figure 9 Impact of social media on questioning information online and in the media. (February 2020, More in Common)

Segment								
Social media has led me to question everything that I see online and in the media.	Segment							All
	Progressive Activists	Civic Pragmatists	Disengaged Battlers	Established Liberals	Loyal Nationals	Disengaged Traditionalists	Backbone Conservatives	
Strongly agree	27%	17%	22%	14%	25%	15%	16%	19%
Somewhat agree	43%	47%	41%	40%	38%	35%	38%	40%
Somewhat disagree	15%	19%	13%	23%	17%	19%	22%	18%
Strongly disagree	10%	9%	7%	11%	11%	11%	14%	11%
Don't know	6%	8%	16%	12%	9%	20%	10%	12%

Figure 10 Media Behaviours (February 2020, More in Common)

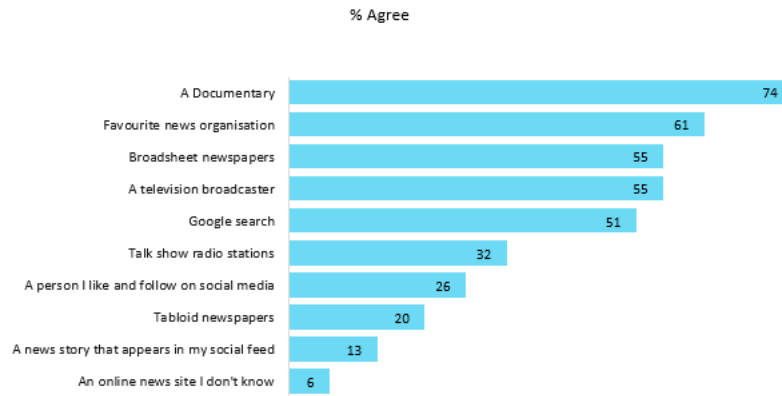
Segment								
In the past 24 hours have you..?	Segment							All
	Progressive Activists	Civic Pragmatists	Disengaged Battlers	Established Liberals	Loyal Nationals	Disengaged Traditionalists	Backbone Conservatives	
Read a blog	17%	5%	5%	9%	4%	3%	4%	6%
Watched local or national TV news, or both	45%	57%	44%	59%	68%	47%	67%	56%
Read a newspaper in print or online, or both	54%	41%	29%	44%	41%	31%	47%	41%
Listened to a radio news program or talk radio	37%	35%	23%	37%	32%	24%	38%	32%
Used social media (such as Facebook or YouTube)	83%	71%	57%	60%	69%	52%	59%	64%
None of these	4%	5%	19%	8%	6%	19%	9%	10%

Figure 11 Trust in news journalists (February 2020, More in Common)

Segment								
News journalists	Segment							All
	Progressive Activists	Civic Pragmatists	Disengaged Battlers	Established Liberals	Loyal Nationals	Disengaged Traditionalists	Backbone Conservatives	
A great deal	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Quite a lot	21%	11%	11%	19%	7%	7%	14%	12%
Not very much	49%	50%	39%	51%	41%	42%	45%	45%
Not at all	25%	35%	43%	26%	48%	41%	36%	37%
Don't know	5%	4%	6%	4%	2%	9%	5%	5%

Figure 12 Trust in sources of information (February 2021, More in Common)

If you learn something from the following sources how likely or unlikely are you to believe it?



Source: More in Common February 2021