

P2 INSIGHTS



National Political Journalist Report

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P2 Public Affairs spoke with 16 of the top political journalists in the country, based in Washington, D.C., New York City, and around the country — ranging from newspaper and digital reporters with must-read bylines to high-ranking TV correspondents for major news networks — discussing their habits and practices for sourcing their stories, ensuring their reporting is unbiased, consuming media to inform their own work, what they wish communications professionals knew, and their takes on the 2024 presidential election. News outlets include: CNN, The Hill, Bloomberg, Wall Street Journal, Axios, Fox News, NBC, CBS, ABC, News Nation, POLITICO, and more. We asked them to answer a series of questions on these topics: **Sourcing, Media Consumption, Engaging with Communications Professionals, and Predicting 2024**. Following is a summary of their responses provided to us on deep background:

SOURCING

“I screwed up if I have a conversation with a source after the story.”

Journalists we spoke to **AVERAGE 5.8 SOURCES** per story.

For breaking news, reporters have relied on as few as two sources, while longer-form investigative or profile pieces have required “dozens” of sources. Most reporters say at least three sources, as long as they’re trusted sources whose motives aren’t in question:

“I always, always, always examine the agenda of the source and play devil’s advocate to make sure I am not just being funneled information like a pawn in a game.”

“I try to ensure quality over quantity. For example, when covering the Hill, I asked myself, ‘What is the leadership’s position on this? Did I talk to enough sources in the room? Who is making the decision and have I reached out to them? Were all parties mentioned given an opportunity to speak?’”

Journalists **don’t always build relationships with their sources** before citing them.

About half of the journalists we spoke to have cultivated relationships over long periods of time, or at least try to have an in-person contact.

“If we can meet in person, that is ideal. In cases where a third person introduces me to a source, I rely on that person to vouch for the new source. If either of those are not options, I’ll do my own research and feel the person out during our interview as best as I can.”

It’s sometimes a gut feeling whether a story is balanced. But balance for balance’s sake isn’t always the goal.

Most of the journalists we spoke to say determining whether a story is balanced comes down to incorporating both sides.

“I often ask the person I’m interviewing something like, ‘Who disagrees with you on this?’ I then call that person or someone with a similar background.”

*“I typically view a story as balanced if I can easily spot two or more differing viewpoints as I read it, or if I see it being shared by people on both sides of the aisle. **Balance is not the goal always – we’re after the truth.**”*

MEDIA CONSUMPTION *“I spend too much time on X (Twitter), like all reporters.”*

Journalists **read a lot of newsletters and skim the linked top stories** from top national and local media outlets.

POLITICO Playbook reigns supreme in newsletter readership among this group. **Punchbowl, Washington Post’s The Daily 202, Semafor, Axios,** and **POLITICO Huddle** were also mentioned repeatedly.

“I read [daily newsletters] and I always try to scan the front page of the NYT. Then, I’ll typically Google keywords relating to my beat and see if there’s any news I missed on the networks/major print papers.”

“Too many newsletters and not enough full stories.”

Nearly half the journalists we spoke to **aren’t watching news daily**.

The other half who watch news daily mostly tune in for the major network morning and evening news shows or stream cable news throughout the day.

“I still like to watch the first 20 minutes of the Today Show or other network morning shows to see what regular, non-political Americans are seeing and dialed into.”

Journalists agree they **rely on Twitter/X** maybe a bit too much.

“Spend too much time on X, like all reporters.”

ENGAGING WITH COMMS PROFESSIONALS

“The worst habit I see in comms professionals today is a lack of face-to-face communication.”

Journalists are fed up with **getting pitches for stories that don’t fit their beats**.

Multiple journalists named this as their top frustration.

“I am often pitched ideas that should go to show or segment producers or stories that are all fluff that will never get covered by me, as opposed to a better venue like our morning show.”

There’s work to be done to foster better relationships between comms flaks and reporters.

“I think the worst habit I see in comms professionals today is a lack of face-to-face communication.”

“I think everyone needs to be treated with basic decency and respect and given the opportunity to engage.....In this hyper-partisan, divided political landscape it can make covering a beat – where you are just trying to report information – more challenging.”

“I think broadly the past few years of openly hostile relationships with some corners of the comms world has jaded a lot of reporters, but we still need to start conversations in a non-hostile way.”

PREDICTING 2024

“The most important ‘campaign’ news is being made in courtrooms and on the world stage.”

Mr. Trump’s legal troubles top the list of interesting storylines to cover this election season.

“How Trump’s legal cases ultimately affect this race will be THE big story. In a general election he could be a convicted felon. How will that shape the race?”

“In 2024, the frontrunner is running a totally different race than any other candidate. He’s not participating in debates or cattle-call events, or even more prosaic campaign events like town halls and retail stops. That means you basically have two parallel campaigns on the GOP side, and a Rose Garden campaign on the Dem side.”

Journalists concede the only effective way to paint the full picture of America when covering elections is to **travel and talk to voters** – and not just at campaign rallies.

“If there is anything we learned from years prior, it’s that getting out and speaking with people honestly, even off camera or on background, is how you REALLY shape your perspective and have a realistic view of election outcomes – the polls, while informative, do not paint the real picture.”

About P2 Public Affairs

We are a specialized communications and strategy firm with decades of combined experience managing and successfully delivering results for our clients. Our partners and principals are battle-tested political and policy operatives who have experience winning the toughest issue advocacy campaigns across the nation and in Washington, D.C.

Authors



Allison Harris, Principal

Allison Harris is a former White House correspondent and Edward R. Murrow award-winning journalist with more than a decade of experience reporting live on breaking news and high-profile stories. Harris was the first White House Correspondent for America's fastest growing cable news network, News Nation, where she helped launch a national morning show and established a presence in the briefing room. She's reported thousands of stories for viewers across the country, including on the pandemic, America's exit from Afghanistan, and the first war in Europe since World War II. Her broadcast journalism career was launched in local news, including in her hometown of Dallas, Texas at KDFW, where she covered Texas politics, Hurricane Harvey, Super Bowl LI, the NFL Draft and shootings in Dallas, Sutherland Springs, El Paso and Odessa. Her reporting has also been Emmy-nominated and recognized by the National Press Club. Harris has a degree in journalism from the University of Oklahoma and has served as an adjunct professor, advising students. She lives in Bethesda, Maryland with her husband and daughter.



Chris Hartline, Principal

Chris Hartline is battle-tested communications professional with more than a decade of experience on political campaigns, in government, on both sides of Capitol Hill and advising major corporations and non-profits. He serves as a Senior Advisor to Florida Senator Rick Scott for his upcoming re-election campaign. Prior to that, he served as Communications Director at the National Republican Senatorial Committee following two years as Communications Director in the office of Sen. Rick Scott. Chris has served in a variety of high-profile communications roles on Capitol Hill and on campaigns around the country and possesses a deep and comprehensive understanding of the intersection between politics and policy.



Katie Miller, Principal

Katie Miller is a political advisor who served as Communications Director for the Vice President of the United States Mike Pence from 2020 to 2021. Previously, she served as his Press Secretary from 2019 to 2020. Miller has also served as Press Secretary for Senator Steve Daines, Spokeswoman for Senator Martha McSally, and Deputy Press Secretary for the United States Department of Homeland Security during the tenure of Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen from November 2017 to February 2019.