



**PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM**

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**New Federal Rules for Media Ownership:  
How Much Does the Public Know?**

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## **New Federal Rules for Media Ownership: How Much Does the Public Know?**

How aware is the American public of the debate currently taking place about changing the rules over media ownership in the United States?

The great majority of Americans, 72%, have heard “nothing at all” about it, according to new survey results released today. Only 4% of Americans say they have heard “a lot.”

The findings may have some bearing on whether federal regulators are moving at the right pace in their policy making. The Federal Communications Commission has proposed sweeping changes in the rules governing how many media outlets corporations can own.

Critics have argued, however, that the public is largely unaware of the proposed changes. One reason, they contend, is that news organizations have failed to cover the debate, both because it is a technical regulatory agency matter and because there is an inherent conflict of interest for the news media in covering their own industry. Another reason, critics argue, is that the FCC has proposed only a single formal public hearing on the matter, scheduled for today, February 27, in Richmond, Va.

But some Commission officials have countered that broad public hearings are unnecessary because the regulatory review on this matter has been ongoing for years, because the public comment period at the Commission yielded broad public input and because of a groundswell of attention recently.

How aware is the public?

To find out, the Project For Excellence in Journalism in collaboration with the Pew Research Center for the People and The Press, decided to ask Americans. The Project is a research institute on the press affiliated with the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. The Center is an independent polling institute that specializes in matters of public awareness of press issues. Both groups are funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

“How much, if anything, have you heard about a Federal Communications Commission proposal to reduce current limits on the number of news outlets one company can own,” the survey asked. “A lot, a little, or nothing at all?”

In all, 72% of Americans said they knew “nothing at all” about the proposed FCC changes.

Only 23% said they had heard “a little.”

A scant 4% said they had heard “a lot.”

The survey also asked people generally whether they thought relaxing the rules on media ownership was more likely to “have a positive or negative impact on the country, or wouldn’t it make much difference.”

<b>Awareness of FCC Media Ownership Proposals</b>	
<i>How much have you heard?</i>	%
A lot	4
A little	23
Nothing at all	72
Don't know/Refused	2
	<hr/> 100

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A lot	4
A little	23
Nothing at all	72
Don't know/Refused	2
	<hr/> 100

Among all Americans, most of whom had heard nothing about the debate, 11% thought relaxing the rules would be positive. A plurality of Americans, 46%, thought, “it wouldn’t make much difference.” A third of Americans, 34%, thought the result would be negative.

In general, knowing more about the debate tended to push people slightly more in the negative category.

Among those who had heard either a little or a lot about the debate, 41% were negative (compared with 34% of all Americans), and 13% were positive (up slightly from 11% of all Americans.)

The number who thought the rule changes would make no difference went down slightly (to 39%, from 46% of all Americans).

The results are based on a survey of 1,254 adults conducted for the Pew Research Center from February 12-18. The survey has a margin of error plus or minus 3 percentage points.

	<b>Allowing Companies to Own More Stations</b>		
		<i>How much heard?</i>	
	All	Lot or a little	Not much
<i>Impact on country?</i>	%	%	%
Positive	11	13	10
Negative	34	41	32
Not much difference	46	39	49
Don't know/Refused	9	7	9
	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**FEBRUARY 2003 NEWS INTEREST INDEX**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**February 12 - 18, 2003**

**Total N=1254**

**ASK ALL:**

And on one last topic...

Q.53 How much, if anything, have you heard about a Federal Communications Commission proposal to reduce current limits on the number of news outlets one company can own ... a lot, a little, or nothing at all?

4	A lot
23	A little
72	Nothing at all
<u>2</u>	Don't know/Refused

100

Q.54 Currently federal rules limit how many news outlets a company can own nationally and in any one community. What's your opinion -- do you think allowing companies to own more TV, radio and newspaper outlets in a community would have a positive or negative impact on the country, or wouldn't it make much difference?

11	Positive
34	Negative
46	Wouldn't make much difference
<u>9</u>	Don't know/Refused

100

**ABOUT THIS SURVEY**

Results for the *February News Interest Index* survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among a nationwide sample of 1,254 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period February 12-18, 2003. Based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

## FCC LIMITS ON MEDIA OWNERSHIP

	<i>How much do you know about this rule?</i>				<i>Increase media ownership impact on the country?</i>				
	<u>DK</u>	<u>A lot</u>	<u>A little</u>	<u>Nothing</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>No Difference</u>	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
<b>Total</b>	4	23	72	2=100	11	34	46	9=100	
<b>Sex</b>									
Male	3	26	69	1	10	38	47	5	
Female	4	20	74	3	11	31	46	12	
<b>Race</b>									
White	2	23	73	2	9	36	45	10	
Non-white	9	21	68	2	18	22	55	4	
Black	12	25	61	2	22	17	57	4	
Hispanic <sup>1</sup>	1	19	78	2	12	24	57	7	
<b>Race and Sex</b>									
White Men	3	26	71	1	8	41	45	6	
White Women	2	21	75	3	10	32	45	14	
<b>Age</b>									
Under 30	2	16	80	1	15	29	52	4	
30-49	3	22	75	1	10	36	47	6	
50-64	5	29	65	1	10	37	40	12	
65+	4	26	62	8	10	29	46	15	
<b>Sex and Age</b>									
Men under 50	3	22	75	*	10	38	49	3	
Women under 50	3	18	78	2	12	31	49	8	
Men 50+	4	34	59	3	10	37	46	8	
Women 50+	5	22	68	5	10	31	41	18	
<b>Education</b>									
College Grad.	4	28	66	1	7	49	35	9	
Some College	3	19	16	3	11	39	43	7	
H.S. Grad.	2	23	73	2	12	27	52	9	
Less than H.S.	6	21	70	3	15	18	57	10	
<b>Family Income</b>									
\$75,000+	3	28	67	1	7	46	42	6	
\$50,000-\$74,999	3	26	71	1	9	42	42	8	
\$30,000-\$49,999	3	23	72	2	8	36	50	6	
\$20,000-\$29,999	3	21	76	1	15	27	49	9	
<\$20,000	6	19	71	4	17	24	51	9	

<sup>1</sup> The designation Hispanic is unrelated to the white-black categorization.

**Question:** How much, if anything, have you heard about a Federal Communications Commission proposal to reduce current limits on the number of news outlets one company can own ... a lot, a little, or nothing at all?

Currently federal rules limit how many news outlets a company can own nationally and in any one community. What's your opinion -- do you think allowing companies to own more TV, radio and newspaper outlets in a community would have a positive or negative impact on the country, or wouldn't it make much difference?

	<i>How much do you know about this rule?</i>				<i>Increase media ownership impact on the country?</i>				
	<u>A lot</u>	<u>A little</u>	<u>Nothing</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>No Difference</u>		
<u>DK</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
<b>Total</b>	4	23	72	2=100	11	34	46	9=100	
<b>Region</b>									
East	3	24	71	3	10	41	42	8	
Midwest	3	24	71	2	10	30	53	7	
South	4	23	72	2	14	30	46	10	
West	4	21	73	2	7	38	45	10	
<b>Religious Affiliation</b>									
Total White Protestant	2	23	72	2	9	38	43	10	
White Protestant Evangelical	3	23	72	3	12	36	40	12	
White Prot. Non-Evangelical	2	24	74	1	6	41	46	7	
White Catholic	2	28	68	2	10	35	45	10	
Secular	4	21	74	1	7	33	55	5	
<b>Community Size</b>									
Large City	7	20	70	4	14	33	46	7	
Suburb	4	25	68	2	8	38	44	10	
Small City/Town	2	25	71	1	12	33	47	8	
Rural Area	2	20	77	1	9	32	48	11	
<b>Party ID</b>									
Republican	3	23	72	1	9	40	44	8	
Democrat	5	25	67	3	16	29	47	9	
Independent	3	22	74	1	8	35	51	6	
<b>Party and Ideology</b>									
Conservative Republican	1	25	73	1	10	43	38	9	
Moderate/Liberal Republican	7	18	74	1	7	34	52	7	
Conservative/Moderate Democrat	5	22	71	2	17	26	49	8	
Liberal Democrat	4	38	56	2	14	44	38	5	
<b>Bush Approval</b>									
Approve	2	22	75	1	11	36	46	7	
Disapprove	5	26	66	3	13	34	48	5	
<b>Marital Status</b>									
Married	3	24	71	2	10	38	44	8	
Unmarried	4	22	72	2	12	30	49	10	

**Parental Status**

Parent	3	20	76	2	10	34	49	7
Non-Parent	4	25	69	2	11	34	45	10

**Labor Union**

Union Household	2	24	73	1	11	39	40	9
Non-Union Household	4	23	71	2	11	33	47	9