

# What Young People Say About News Media Coverage

*An analysis of recent research on what youth want from news coverage*

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## IN BRIEF

**Young people reported being both underreported and unfairly portrayed.** 31% of young people (ages 18–24) said that they are not covered enough and 35% said that they are covered unfairly.

**Young peoples’ priorities:** cost of living, healthcare and housing lead by wide margins, and racism ranks fourth among Black respondents.

**Relatability is the main ask to media.** Across entertainment and news research alike, young people said that they want to see people and situations they recognize.

**Teens’ views of news media are overwhelmingly negative.** Asked for one word to describe news media today, most (84%) U.S. teens (under 18) chose something negative, and only 23% believed newsrooms regularly correct errors.

journalists, editors and newsrooms:

- The News Literacy Project’s survey of 756 U.S. teens ages 13–18 (2025).
- The Reuters Institute’s analysis of twelve years of Digital News Report data on 18–24 year-olds, drawn from up to 48 markets internationally (Robertson et al., 2026).
- The Media Insight Project’s survey of 1,009 U.S. teens ages 13–17 alongside 1,092 adults (2026).
- CIRCLE at Tufts’ survey of 5,549 U.S. residents ages 18–29, oversampling Black and Latinx respondents (CIRCLE & When We All Vote, 2026).
- The Center for Scholars & Storytellers’ survey of 1,500 U.S. teens and young adults ages 10–24 on entertainment media (Puretz et al., 2025).
- Interviews with U.S. teen journalists conducted by the American Press Institute (Harkness, 2026).

*Note: The studies varied in terms of population, with three studies including teens (under 18), two including young adults (between 18-24 or 18-29), and another including teens and young adults (between 10-24). The wording also varies across these studies.*

## I. Overview

International Youth Day, observed each August 12, is marked this year under the United Nations theme “Different Contexts, Common Aspirations,” and is the idea that while young people’s lives are shaped by very different national realities, what they want is remarkably consistent around the world (UN DESA, 2026).

Much of the public conversation about young people and news treats them as a problem to be solved. Six studies released over this past year ask teens and young adults what they think of news coverage and what they want from it. This brief synthesizes the findings for

## II. Findings

### 1. Young people said that they’re both underreported and covered unfairly

- The American Press Institute interviewed teen journalists who described youth coverage as too narrow, focusing almost exclusively on school policy, social media addiction, and youth crime (Harkness, 2026).

- Teens told the American Press Institute that they want their lives reflected more fully in news coverage about youth (Harkness, 2026).
- Reuters Institute data showed that among 18-24 year-olds, nearly one-third (31%) said that they are not covered enough, and more than one-third (35%) said that they are covered unfairly (Robertson et al., 2026).
- Young people who avoided the news stated that the news “doesn’t seem relevant to them” (21%) (Robertson et al., 2026).

## 2. Young peoples’ top issue priorities: cost of living, healthcare, housing, and racism

- CIRCLE at Tufts surveyed 5,549 U.S. residents ages 18–29 between January 26 and February 12, 2026, oversampling Black and Latinx respondents and found that their top issue priorities were: cost of living and inflation (65%); Healthcare (45%); and Housing costs (45%) (CIRCLE & When We All Vote, 2026).
- Black respondents ranked Racism fourth, much higher than in the overall sample. Black respondents also ranked student loan debt, gun policy, voting rights, and criminal justice reform at higher rates than other respondents (CIRCLE & When We All Vote, 2026).
- Young people said that it makes no sense for news outlets to be neutral on certain issues, such as racism, climate change, and topics they consider hateful or harmful (32%) (Robertson et al., 2026).

## 3. Young people want realistic, relevant and relatable topics

- In a survey of 1,009 U.S. teens ages 13–17 alongside 1,092 adults in February 2026, nearly half (48%) of teens follow lifestyle topics closely, including entertainment, sports, gaming, health and wellness, more than any other age group (Media Insight Project, 2026).
- In a survey of 1,500 U.S. teens and young adults ages 10–24 nationwide in August 2025, young people stated that they wanted realistic and relatable

stories from entertainment media (Puretz et al., 2025).

- One high school senior told the American Press Institute that, “the most impactful stories are just people-first journalism...the ones that stick with you” (Harkness, 2026).

## 4. Teens’ views of news media are largely negative

- The News Literacy Project asked 756 U.S. teens (ages 13–18) what single word best described news media today, and most teens (84%) stated, “fake,” “lies,” “crazy,” “chaotic,” or other negative words (News Literacy Project, 2025).
- Less than one-third (30%) of teens believed that journalists frequently confirm facts before reporting. Half (50%) believed journalists frequently make up details like quotes, and 23% thought newsrooms regularly correct errors (News Literacy Project, 2025).
- Teens stated that journalists could improve by being honest and getting the facts right (283 responses), and by minimizing bias and improving balance (138 responses) (News Literacy Project, 2025).

## III. Ways to Address Young People’s Concerns

In light of these findings, here are seven steps journalists, editors and news organizations can take:

1. **Broaden the news agenda** toward the topics young people said they care about (Robertson et al., 2026).
2. **Hire young journalists** who’ve grown up with digital storytelling and who represent the audience (Robertson et al., 2026).
3. **Invite young people into the room** with newsroom decision-makers (Harkness, 2026) and compensate them for their time and expertise.
4. **Include young peoples’ lived experience** rather than relying only on adults to explain issues that affect young people (Harkness, 2026).

5. **Report on young peoples’ communities with people that they can relate to.** Teens said coverage does not need to be upbeat as long as it is authentic (Harkness, 2026).
6. **Give young people something to do with the information** such as a story offering actionable steps (solutions journalism) or featuring young people already working on the problem (Harkness, 2026).
7. **Publish realistic and relatable portrayals of young people,** as young people value seeing people and situations they recognize (Puretz et al., 2025).

## IV. Conclusion

Across these studies, young people stated that they want media coverage that reflects their situations and also features people like them. Young people want media coverage to be made for them, informed by them, and about issues they care about and can relate to.

## V. References

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Report for Youth Justice helps journalists tell fairer, more complete stories about young people impacted by the juvenile justice system — grounded in data and research, and centered on youth sharing their perspectives and solutions.

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